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BEANY-EYE

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BEANY-EYE

By

DAVID GARNETT



CHATTO AND WINDUS
LONDON

First published October 1935
First issued in the Phoenix Library
1937

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TO
GERALD BRENNAN

Contents

Part One	<i>Page</i> 1
Part Two	46
Part Three	97

BEANY-EYE

Part One

MY father first saw Joe in a gravel-pit on the common where he was working apart from the other men who kept together in a group: they were Binegars, big clumsy men with pale eyes and fair beards, brothers whom it was impossible to tell apart. They were protected against the weather by three or four waiscoats or cardigans apiece and protectively coloured by their sandy corduroys, and they seemed to huddle together for protection too. It was a bitterly cold evening but Beany-eye was working in his shirt and his thin trousers showed the moulding of his muscles beneath; on his head he kept a black bowler beneath the rim of which the tickling sweat streamed from his forehead over his face. He had been working all day and by the time dusk was falling he was working so fast that he seemed to be fighting the yellow mounds of gravel that he was shifting back in barrowloads to where a horse and cart could back into the pit. My father, coming across the open heather, saw the

BEANY-EYE

solitary man whirling and stabbing with the shovel as though he were bayonet fighting, then, throwing it down to seize the barrow-handles and, with a staggering run, rush the load uphill, keeping it balanced on the trembling plank and finally hurl it over sideways on to the heap. Beyond him, the angry sunset, like a smithy forge livened by the bellows of the wind, glowed between dark clouds threatening snow. When my father looked down again the figure of the labourer fighting with the sand had gone quite black; the silhouette of the black shovel was whirling against the sky at the ends of black diabolic arms. My father leaped lightly into the pit, swinging his stick, and the furious movements of the figure were suddenly arrested. Holding the shovel upraised as though to strike, he gazed at the tall man who had suddenly appeared close beside him.

'A cold night,' called my father, but the quarryman, gripping his shovel like a club, made no answer but stood glaring from under the brim of his black bowler. My father passed on with a strange feeling and his curiosity led him to pause for a moment and ask one of the Binegars: 'Who's that fellow, working by himself?'

The dazed faces of the Binegars expressed wonder that changed to oafish amusement at the question. The liveliest guffawed, a second repeated the question in another form: 'Don't ye

BEANY-EYE

know 'oo 'e is then, Mr Butler?' while the third gave the desired information. 'He's Joe. Brother to your Sam as was. Joe Starling. They calls 'im Beany-eye.'

My father went on his way, striking at little stones with his stick, but he turned once more and looked back and saw that the dark figure who had been so furious in his activity was still standing motionless, with his shovel clubbed in his hands, staring after him.

'Just out of prison,' thought my father. 'That accounts for those wild defiant looks and for the way in which he gripped the shovel like a weapon — and perhaps that accounts for the fury with which he was working before he saw me. The reflection moved him to pity and he thought how great was the cruelty of shutting a man like that up in an institution in which there could be no outlet for that magnificent wild energy, from inside the walls of which he would look back with longing to the days of toil and freedom. Well, Joe was happy once more, working savagely in that wild spot in the bitter frost in his cotton shirt and flimsy trousers to earn enough to buy himself food, lodging and a warmer coat honestly. Not that Joe had gone to prison on the last occasion for anything dishonest: the story came back to his memory in detail. The Starlings had been a starved family of wild children until the mother had, late in her

BEANY-EYE

widowhood, married the soapy fraud, old Lewis the greengrocer. Joe was the eldest, and one night when he threatened to do for his stepfather, his mother had locked him out of their cottage and he had been taken in charge by the police after he had broken all the windows and kept all the neighbours awake till morning with shouts and threats and abuse. Mrs Lewis had given evidence against her son and had asked the magistrates to give him a long sentence as she was afraid of him. It was that which had made the case talked of in the neighbourhood so that even my father had heard of it.

Simple people are very much affected by words, and when a word has two meanings they confuse them. Everyone who knew Joe, and all the men who had worked with him, called him a 'funny kind of chap' and said he was 'funny-tempered' or a 'funny set-out and no mistake.' And because of this they imagined that Joe was in some way amusing and he had a widely accepted reputation as a humourist. His chief claim to it was that a good many people were afraid of him. The word would go round that Joe had scared the life out of young Wally and his reputation as a funny man would go up. Occasionally he had, however, really done something to deserve it. Thus he had once picked a quarrel with a Salvation Army Captain and had chased him over Bratley common with an axe. When the Salvationist became too

BEANY-EYE

exhausted to run any further, he dropped on to his knees and Joe, coming up with him, produced a Bible which he had taken away from the Salvationist before the chase started, and swore that he would cut the Captain's head off unless he took a solemn oath that he believed every word in the Holy Book. Naturally enough everyone was delighted by this incident; even the Salvationist felt a glow in retrospect and felt that the Lord had interceded on his behalf, and this was a further cause for local merriment.

However, in spite of being 'funny' Joe was never popular as a companion; his temper was too violent and too uncertain and, even among the outcasts, men avoided him. He was, however, more popular with men than with women. No girl had ever walked out with Joe, or been his sweetheart, while one or two men were his friends. Frank Charles, who kept 'The Greyhound' in Bratley, was a true friend of Joe's and had done a lot to help him. As for the police — they kept out of his way as far as they decently could. It took a lot of them to run him in, and though Joe never meant harm and was, as the sergeant said, 'only his own enemy,' if he had any contact with the police he left the force black and blue for a week. Such was this man's local reputation.



BEANY-EYE

A week after my father had walked through the quarry he was told that tea was ready but that Joe Starling was waiting to speak with him, and he went down from his study to the back door. There was no one there and my father at once went out and up to the stable where, as he expected, the man was waiting. There is a great distinction in the country between waiting to speak to a gentleman cap in hand at his back door, and waiting for him up by the stable where conversation is carried on in a less humble manner. At the back door you receive the contemptuous or inquisitive glances of the servants and are subject to their eavesdropping. But if you wait up at the stable you prove that you are not a beggar but have come on a man's errand — to sell a pony or a puppy, or a cord of wood. The man who asks for charity or charitable favours has not this privilege; he has to wait on the doorstep and run the risk that the master of the house will say 'Not to-day,' and shut the door in his face. Thus when Beany-eye had knocked at the door and had asked for Mr Butler, he walked back away from the house to the stable and waited there and my father immediately understood that he had come on business.

Our house had been built a few years previously upon an old green pasture that lay half-encircled by a wooded hillside and, itself ringed with shaw and coppice, sloped steeply downhill to where it

BEANY-EYE

was flanked by a long undulating meadow. At the far end of this, on lower ground, was the cottage where our servant lodged. That way it was about three miles to Bulling Green, while up the wooded hillside, above the house, was a path that led to our nearest neighbours, the little hamlet of Shirley Gate, and connected us with the main road to Bratley. But to go back to Beany-eye.

When my father's head appeared over the top of the back steps he was able to see that the man waiting for him was a mere tramp and for a moment he felt angry at being made to come out into the north-east wind. Then he was touched at the independence and self-respect of the poor fellow he had seen working in the quarry. It was cold. Little crumbs of snow were falling at rare intervals and lay like scurf among the withered grass on the rocklike frozen ground. Beany-eye was standing quite still in a thin ragged suit without an overcoat. His jacket had been made for a much smaller man and his wrists stuck far out from the short sleeves. They, his clenched fists and his face, neck and ears were all a dark purple, almost the colour of pickled cabbage. He stared with an unwinking stare at the approaching figure, a gaze that lacked any trace of intelligence or expression, and my father noticed the slight cast in his left eye which had given him his nickname. Yes, he was a queer figure that seemed not to be made of flesh and

BEANY-EYE

blood but to be wooden, and my father was surprised when he heard the voice addressing him tremble slightly, as though the man were on the brink of tears.

'I've come, Sir. I've come to ask if you'll take me on, Sir. I'd sooner work for a gentleman like you, Mr Butler. I've been in trouble and it beats me to work alongside a lot of fellows.'

'I saw you in the quarry with the Binegars,' said my father.

'I've finished there. That Fred Binegar won't have forgot me come Mayday. I crowned 'im. But, Sir, I'm a handy man. I'll be useful at anything and would get the place so you wouldn't know it, if I could be working by myself. It's being in trouble, Sir, and working along with other fellows what has me beat. I'll get in trouble again if I don't work for a gentleman like you, Sir.'

'Well . . . I don't know,' began my father.

'You can rest easy in your mind, Sir, about me. It's being in trouble. It leaves you looking no-account. But I was a smart young chap o' Sundays. You had my young brother here. I was always worth two of 'im with my hands. I'll make the place lovely, Sir, so you won't know it when you step out of your front door.'

My father gave in almost at once and took Beany-eye on for a couple of weeks' work, to cut the shaw above the house, to dig the kitchen garden

BEANY-EYE

and to do odd jobs. Moreover he gave him, rather doubtingly, permission to sleep in the stable. When my father came down to the house he told my mother what he had done while she poured him out a cup of tea and he was surprised to find that she was very much annoyed at our having Beany-eye about the place.

'You ought to have asked me first or told me what you were doing. He has just come out of prison and his temper is notorious. Even his own mother is afraid of him. And you remember Sam Starling was never much good.'

My father was so angry at this criticism that he jumped up from the tea-table, rushed upstairs, seized an old pair of his own trousers and an old jacket and ran out of the house with them after Beany-eye, into the wood.



Beany-eye showed the same fury that had marked his work in the gravel-pit, when he began to cut down the shaw above our house. It was tough, tangled underwood which ought to have been cut some years back so that there was some big stuff amongst it. When he got hold of a tough bit of ash, or thorn, or maple, springing from the stool, Beany-eye would rain blows on it with the billhook, not careful, slicing, bevelled blows, but

BEANY-EYE

slashing, furious, repetitive assaults which lasted until he had somehow hacked it off, when he would throw down the billhook, or the axe, and drag the severed pole out of the undergrowth, stare at it for a little while and, suddenly seizing the axe, begin to hack and slash again. Thus his progress was not accompanied by the tidiness and order that usually marks the woodman's work. There were no neat piles of brushwood waiting to be trimmed up into faggots, no fascies of hazel-wands to be twisted into withy bonds, no pile of trimmed poles for stakes or bean-sticks. Everything lay criss-cross as it had been hurled by Beany-eye with all his might; splinters projected from all the stumps and the torn-down clearing was more tangled and matted than the undergrowth which had been left standing. The copse was devastated and when the sap rose in spring, the battered stumps sent up but few and feeble shoots.

Whenever there was an odd-job man employed about the place I used to go and watch him at his work, talk to him, go off and play around and then watch and talk to him again. I was an only child and, standing on my own ground (our copse seemed to me like a forest at eight years old), I was not in the least shy and rather expected the hired man to entertain me and mind what I said. Beany-eye, I think, was sometimes glad of an audience and sometimes glad to have even a child to

BEANY-EYE

keep him company and protect him from his thoughts.

I have three vivid memories of these conversations. Once Beany-eye suddenly stopped in the middle of his work and I followed him out of the coppice into the big wood above the house. The hillside there was full of holly trees in those days and Beany-eye led the way to a big hollybush and with his jack-knife cut a long slender dark-green wand that shot up straight among the suckers round the bole. Then he led the way back to the stable in which he had taken up his quarters, pausing to look warily round to see if we had been seen by anybody. Fortunately we got back safely without being observed. Indeed it was very rare for one to meet anyone in the wood. Once he was under cover, Beany-eye set to work to trim off the branches, leaving projecting ornamental knobs, and to peel off all the bark.

'A guinea each they fetch,' he said. 'For carriage whips. And I know where there's a score and I'll get 'em.' A ferocious look came into his face and he muttered: 'If any of those old didikay travellers go pinching of 'em, I'll be even with 'em. I'll pull their livers out.'

For a moment, I think, he may have suspected that I would betray his gold mine — and I was certainly impressed at the thought of his receiving twenty golden sovereigns for as many holly-sticks

BEANY-EYE

— but a friendlier look came over his face and he said:

‘You keep a look-out, sonny, and let me know sharp if you see any of the old bastards round about.’

The lovely white-peeled wand delighted him; looking at it he, and I also, firmly believed that the old harness-maker at Bratley would pay out a piece of gold for it, nor did it seem unnatural that he should. People would pay any amount of money for a smart carriage whip, and Beany-eye would cut twenty wands as good as this one and come back with gold jingling in his pockets. So I promised to keep watch over his holly trees and warn him if I saw any tramps coming through the wood.

One morning while I was standing watching him at work with my hands in my overcoat pockets, our dogs roused a rabbit in the wood above us which bolted through our shaw across the top of our garden and into the next field. I was already becoming a keen rabbitier, but Beany-eye’s excitement was far greater than mine. Both of us raced as fast as we could after the dogs, I slipped through and Beany-eye burst by main force through the hedge and vaulted the post and rail fence beyond and dashed across the old pasture and found the dogs at the mouth of a burrow on a very precipitous bank, or shaw, which divided the meadow and which we always called the ravine. It is at

BEANY-EYE

the bottom of this ravine that I always visualise the scene so beautifully described by Turgenev in 'Byezhin Prairie' though I cannot have read the 'Sportsman' Sketches before I was ten years old — two years after the events that I am describing.

There were two dogs: Nietzsche, a little short-haired red mongrel with a bushy tail like a fox, and Puppsie, a collie of imbecile disposition afflicted with a spasmodic twitch of the left forepaw. I was brought up to gentle treatment of these animals and was horrified when Beany-eye, who seemed to have been transformed into a wild beast himself, flung Puppsie from the mouth of the rabbit-bury down the almost sheer face of the ravine and, dropping in front of the hole, seized Nietzsche by the tail, dragged him out with terrific force, and sent him also flying backwards, with all four legs asprawl, down the scree of Kentish ragstone. Then he flung himself as far down the hole as he could reach, but, of course, he could come nowhere near the rabbit. By the time that he had withdrawn his head and shoulders, the dogs were limping back and I very heatedly told him that he must never dare to treat them like that again. Beany-eye was in a very odd state just then; his head was full of sand and his face smeared with it; his whole expression was almost apoplectic with frenzied excitement, his lips twitching with passion. But I also was very angry; Nietzsche was slipping

BEANY-EYE

between his knees down the hole and Nietzsche was my dog. So I spoke up fiercely and threatened Beany-eye that if he laid a hand on the dogs it would be the worse for him. I would tell. I don't know quite why I didn't go the way of the dogs; I was balanced on a tiny ledge beside Beany-eye at the mouth of the bury, and the slightest push would have sent me flying to the bottom of the ravine. But Beany-eye only stared as though he didn't see me, whilst his mouth twisted, and my words, though not having an immediate effect, had some. Slowly he calmed down and then we went off to fetch a spade and a pick. But by the time he had returned with them from the stable he was cool enough to see that the rabbit-hole ran through the roots of an old pollard ash and that it would be a labour of hours to dig the rabbit out. So, after a little while, the hunt was abandoned and we climbed up out of the ravine, while Nietzsche stared with a look of questioning disillusion at our backs before plunging into the hole to do his digging for himself single-handed. For Puppis was useless.

We were not always uninterrupted since my mother had reasons of her own for disliking my being too much in Beany-eye's company and would call me down to the house if she thought I was up in the stable. She was, however, a very busy woman and for several hours a day the affairs of Vronsky, Levin and Dolly were perforce as real to

BEANY-EYE

her as those of her own household. Thus it would happen that, if, after looking up a difficult word in the dictionary, she chanced to notice my absence, she would go to the door with the book in her hand and call me down from the stable. But that did not always mean that the evening was over, since once her nib began to scrape faster and faster across the sheets of foolscap, there was always a fair chance that I could slip quietly out of the back door and return to hear what Beany-eye still had to say. And if it was hard to keep me away from him in the evening, it was impossible during the day. My mother was glad to think that very soon I should be going back to my little day-school, attendance at which had been interrupted by a neighbouring case of measles.

My mother's instinctive fear of Beany-eye was tempered by exasperation at the way in which he had been doing his work and with my father for employing him. And she was also exasperated with herself for feeling afraid of the man, and for being unable to argue fairly about him with my father. When she explained how much she disliked having him round the house, my father would listen patiently and say:

'It is just because everyone has this instinctive feeling about the poor fellow that he is an outcast in this pitiable condition. What on earth is the good of setting out to help a man if you are going

BEANY-EYE

to give way at once to the same unreasoning prejudices as everybody else?’

My mother recognised that this argument was unanswerable and she knew that my father would think it unworthy of her to ask: ‘But why must *we* help this man? Why shouldn’t someone else do it for a change?’

The morning after this conversation my father decided to work with Beany-eye in cutting up the trunk of a large pine tree which, standing in the corner of our copse, had been violently uprooted by a south-westerly gale and had crashed through the fence into the wood. It was one of those bright January mornings when there is not a breath of wind and the hoar frost sparkles along the edges of every fallen leaf, when the redbreast perches close by for company and when, in spite of the frost, one soon takes off one’s waistcoat as well as one’s coat if one is working out of doors.

My father and Beany-eye carried out the cross-cut saw and soon set to work, but though Beany-eye took the lower ground, they found some difficulty in settling down. Then directly they had got going, my father was out of breath and they took a rest.

‘You don’t need to push the Saw, sir. You are trying to do my work as well as your own. If you just pull and I just pull it will cut like butter,’ said Beany-eye.

BEANY-EYE

When they began again, my father acted on his advice and pulled, then, letting his arm go slack, waited for Beany-eye to pull the blade back and then pulled again himself. As soon as he mastered the trick of letting his arm go quite slack and caught the right rhythm, the work went of itself, and the saw-blade sank deeper rapidly until its back was below the burnt-sienna, crocodile-skin bark and a strong scent of resin filled the still air. A moment later they had finished the first cut that severed the whole head of the pine tree and, before they began again, the postman came down the steep path through the wood from the little hamlet of Shirley Gate and, seeing my father, stopped and handed the letters and newspaper out of his bag.

'You've heard the news, Sir, I suppose? The Queen is dead.'

It was Tuesday, January 22, and although since the previous Friday it had been announced that the Queen was very ill, my father was tremendously surprised and could hardly believe the fact. Queen Victoria had been such a landmark for so many years, she was so much taken for granted as part of the permanent condition of the world, that her subjects could hardly imagine it without her.

'Do you hear, Joe, that the Queen is dead?' he said as they took up the crosscut again.

'Yes, master. And you may lay that it's the war what's killed her. She hasn't been able to

BEANY-EYE

sleep at night thinking of the Boers creeping up and killing our poor fellows. She kept seeing our young chaps going off and thinking of them lying out in the moonlight dead and murdered by them Boers. That's what killed her poor soul, depend upon it.'

'Well, she was a good age you know, Joe, anyhow.'

When they had finished the next cut my father took the newspaper down to the house for my mother and, when he came back, Beany-eye said:

'I saw the Prince of Wales at Epsom once, fat as a turkey, a real sportsman by the look of him. That's what we want. A king what loves a bit of sport.'

They went on working happily in unison, their faces dewy with sweat and the grains of sawdust caught in the unshaven stubble of Beany-eye's beard. When they had cut the trunk into five or six lengths, my father went down again to the house and brought back two bottles of beer.

It was a peaceful and delightful moment, and I remember coming up to them and looking at the foam standing up above the rim of the glass and watching Beany-eye's face as my father handed it to him, and he took it in his trembling fingers and drank it off rather unsteadily and a trickle of beer went running down from the corner of his mouth among the grains of sawdust on his chin. The

BEANY-EYE

robin that had been hopping near them, perched on the fence and began to sing.

'Let's see if we can split up one of these short lengths,' said my father, and fetched the axe from the stable.

'Let me have it,' cried Joe, suddenly excited, and, taking it, whirled it over his head, almost shouting out as he did so: 'Stand clear, Sir, stand clear. Don't come too near me,' in such an earnest voice that we felt quite amazed by him.

The blow, however, that Beany-eye delivered did not split the log and the axe had to be wrenched out again and again before at length he was successful.

'That will do for now, Joe,' said my father. 'You can split up the rest with the wedges and beetle later on and clear up the pine branches this afternoon and stack them by the woodpile.'

And at lunch my father told us that Beany-eye had been working quite well.

'The after-effects of prison are working off. He's not nearly so wild and talked quite well about the Queen's death and the Prince of Wales.'

Sometimes when it was getting dark or was raining, I would go up to the stable and Beany-eye would tell me stories while he chopped and whittled at a short ash stake. He collected lengths of old iron and formed an armoury of rusty old knives, broken shears, ancient scythe-blades, bill-

BEANY-EYE

hooks and hatchets, and among them, I remember, there was the iron bar and coulter of a plough. But he also had a partiality for a wooden weapon, and it is this which I remember that he was shaping. It was a short truncheon of ash-plant, with a smoothed handle and a heavy head which terminated in a sharp conical point. Except that it was short, so that one man might use it single-handed, it was like the pointed olive-wood stake that Odysseus fashioned to put out the eye of Polyphemus. Beany-eye made two of these, and while he was hacking at them with his jack-knife or scraping them with a piece of broken glass, he told me many strange stories, all but one of which have now vanished, leaving nothing behind but a memory of my childish wonder and incredulity. I suppose the reason why I remember this one story is because I absolutely and unquestioningly believed it. It was impossible not to do so, for he related it with the intense horror and conviction of a man describing a personal experience. It was about rats.

According to Beany-eye, there were not only the ordinary rats such as I had seen, which lived in their twos and threes and half-dozens about the house and the dust-heap and after which men went ratting, but at certain times and places there were other rats which gathered into armies, recruited from all the garbage-heaps of the country, and

BEANY-EYE

these armies soon became hungry and travelled about in lonely places eating up everything they came across. When one of these great rat-armies found a man sleeping out of doors in a ditch, they ate him alive. Nothing of him was ever seen again, not one trace, because there was such a vast army that when a thousand rats had eaten all the flesh off his bones, there were still thousands more of the starving behind them that gnawed up and devoured every fragment of the skeleton.

Beany-eye had seen this happen with his own eyes and he himself had escaped from the rat-army almost by a miracle. It had been a brilliant moonlight night and Beany-eye had been lying in the loft of a big barn in Kent when he woke up at the sound of a terrible screaming, and looking out through a loose board he had seen a figure jump up, run a little way and fall down. It was a man completely covered in rats that were tearing at his throat, his ears, his nose, and that had bitten out his eyes already.

'They'd blinded 'im, mate. They'd gone for his eyes while he was on the ground, while he was asleep. As soon as he opened 'is eyes, they 'ad nailed him.'

The ground on which this figure ran was thickly packed with rats, and as fast as he tore one off his body another took its place, while the screaming blinded man ran over the bodies of his enemies

BEANY-EYE

into their thickest ranks, until at last he tumbled over a ditch and never rose again. And all night Beany-eye lay watching the black ranks of the rat-army scurrying about in the brilliant moonlit yard; knowing that if he made an incautious movement, or drew a deep breath, that they would hear him and that he would suffer the same terrible fate as the man whom he had seen eaten alive.

For hours there had been a thick cluster of rats all round the ditch where the man had fallen, but at last the whole army got on the move and before dawn the last ranks had disappeared. Not till the sun had risen did Beany-eye come down from his hiding-place and he saw that not a spot of blood, not a morsel of the man's bones nor of his clothing had been left. That day Beany-eye travelled as far as possible.

I knew that he was telling the truth while I listened to this story. It was not vaguely horrible like the dreadful fears that I had experienced myself when the wind in the chimney would turn into the laugh of a hyaena, or my mother's dressing-gown became animated by some blood-curdling spirit of evil. It was not like the rhinoceros in our cellar, a creature I had invented and was rather proud of, but which sometimes got out of hand and revenged himself on his creator for keeping him in such a narrow prison. What Beany-eye was speaking of was an experience, it was not hear-

BEANY-EYE

say, and it had been so terrible that even the bravest man could hardly face the thought of encountering it again. Moreover the story did not strike me as at all extraordinary; it was just what I should have expected of such creatures and bore out what I had always heard of them. Someone had read the 'Pied Piper of Hamelin' to me and well I knew that:

Rats!

They fought the dogs and killed the cats
And bit the babies in the cradles.

And as for eating the man up, down to his bones and boots, had not the rats at Froghole eaten a whole set of ash cricket-stumps which my father had oiled before he put them away for the winter? That they had, and some of the scarred stumps still existed to prove what famished rats will do. Thus I stood listening with nothing but respect and horror, watching the wooden face of my new friend while his broken-nailed fingers kept turning the ash truncheon round and round and scraping it smoother and smoother.

For all the while the rats were mustering their legions and Beany-eye busied himself more and more in preparing his armaments so as to be ready for whatever was in store for him. He was a brave and very simple man; there was a dreadful nemesis awaiting him; he felt it coming and he prepared for it simply and prudently. The powers of evil

BEANY-EYE

were vast and irresistible but they should not catch him unarmed. And while he sat scraping and whittling by the light of a candle, stuck in the neck of a bottle, it was a comfort to him to have my companionship, to speak knowing that someone was listening, to know that my eight-year-old heart beat in my breathless breast as he told the horrors that he had known.

Occasionally Beany-eye sought other company than mine, and one afternoon when my mother and I had gone out to tea, he came down the steps to the back door, opened it and walked in and sat down in the kitchen opposite Mabel, the slender London girl who came in to work for us all day, but who slept in a cottage, not up the hill at Shirley Gate but across the fields in the valley. Mabel was naturally gay and ought to have been pretty, but she had had a bad time all her life and had been so ill that she was rather a battered piece of goods at one and twenty, with dark circles under dark frightened eyes and a rather fetching curly little fringe in the East End coster style.

But as soon as Beany-eye came in and sat down opposite her, he saw that she was going to be no good to him at all. Her fingers trembled so that she could hardly hold the teapot when he told her to pour him out a cup of tea; when she lifted her own cup to drink, the rim rattled uncontrollably against her pretty row of false teeth. There was

BEANY-EYE

no hope for him to start talking about what was on his mind until she had settled down a bit and had got used to him and had stopped being frightened. So he drank his cup of tea, pushed back his chair into the corner by the kitchen stove and watched her with his unblinking wooden stare, in silence.

Beany-eye was usually amused by people being frightened of him; he liked to feel that the great hulking Binegars kept huddled together when he was working in the gravel-pit. But he found no solace now in Mabel's fear. He wanted a woman, and Mabel was desirable, but above all he wanted a companion who would take his mind off the nameless thing that had driven him into the house. Her fear kept him constantly in mind of his own and he saw that it was a mistake for him to have come. For a time he tried to think if there was any tender thing that he could say to set her fear at rest, but he could not speak without betraying himself. He could not face going back to the stable for a bit and sat staring at Mabel, while the poor girl moved about trying to put away the tea things and wash them up, to light the lamp and draw the curtains. He sat there without speaking for two hours until my mother and I came home, and then he went on sitting there for three-quarters of an hour more, after my mother had told him to go. He saw Mabel's terror of him growing all

BEANY-EYE

the time, until she was too terrified to be hysterical. He watched her soft and flimsy limbs, but he knew it would only add to the terror outside if he were to take hold of her and she were to scream. He wanted her, but he wanted help more, and he sat and watched her, puzzled to know what to do.

Beany-eye had a very strong, penetrating, individual odour; he smelt, not simply of a powerful unwashed man who has sweated into his clothes and slept in them for months, but, reinforcing and overpowering these scents, was the smell of Beany-eye himself. And it was this emanation, filling the kitchen and scullery and even the passage beyond, which did most to paralyse poor Mabel. His staring, unwinking presence was appalling, but his smell bereft her of the power of speech and even of the power of thought. Meanwhile Beany-eye, knowing nothing of this unfortunate peculiarity, sat very quietly, puzzling his brains and not moving except for an occasional unconscious muscular twitch, like a cat wondering how to get on comfortable terms with a mouse.

At last he got up and went away through the woods to 'The Greyhound' in Bratley just as the moon was rising. Now that he was working regularly he was able to afford to drink a good deal — indeed most of his money went in whisky. He would buy a bottle of it to take away before he started drinking and Frank Charles always got him

BEANY-EYE

out of the bar before he was drunk. They would have some drinks at Frank's expense and recall some of their old times together, when they had cleared off a hundred of the Colonel's pheasants in one night, or when Beany-eye had knocked out three men in under the quarter-hour, in a boxing ring at Mitcham Fair, and then Frank would see him off on the road home, would see him out of the town into the Park, a bit lit-up but not drunk. He would knock the neck off the bottle on the trunk of the first of the big beeches and after that he would take a big gulp of whisky every few hundred yards, but he would not be incapably drunk until he had got back through the dark woods and felt his way into the stable past the drum of kerosene, on to the old wicker couch which my father had given him to sleep on.

Beany-eye found that drink had a very queer effect on him. So long as he was drinking, the nameless thing which he was afraid of kept a long way off, usually it was driven right away out of sight, and if Frank left him in the bar, the more he drank the more he could make the men laugh at what he said. Though, if he stayed long enough, some bastard was sure to laugh in the wrong place and would get crowned with a broken glass or an empty bottle. But Beany-eye himself always felt fine, and if he could drop off asleep or fall unconscious, he would be all right. But when he

BEANY-EYE

couldn't sleep, then things began to look different, and if he started to get the horrors, or to think of them before he did fall asleep, he knew that when he woke up next morning the terror would be very near.

When my mother saw how terrified Mabel was of him, she decided that she could not have him any longer about the house. Mabel was quite right to be afraid of him; she was afraid of him herself. That was the simple fact, and life is not worth living if one is afraid in one's own home. My father was away that night in London, and when Mabel had been sufficiently restored to run home across the fields, my mother locked the doors and put me to bed. The kitchen still smelt so strong of Beany-eye that it made her feel sick to enter it. She had spoken of the man's smell to my father who replied in an irritable voice, because he knew that he was trying to score a dishonest point:

'I have no doubt at all that what you refer to is the smell that a man gets from being in prison. Perhaps if you reflect that Kropotkin must have once smelled much the same you will be a little more tolerant and sympathetic. In the open air and living in freedom, it will work off very soon.'

And my father haughtily withdrew and, going upstairs, sorted through his wardrobe and soon afterwards went up to the stable carrying an old

BEANY-EYE

woollen vest and a pair of pants with holes in them and a flannel shirt that was shrunk in the wash, for Beany-eye. They ought to help to get rid of the smell. However, it was plain next morning that they had made no difference. To tell the truth, I cannot myself ever remember smelling Beany-eye *when he was there*, but I could always tell where he had been from the aroma that he had left behind. I can only suppose that when he was actually there it was too concentrated for my nose to take it in at all.

When, however, my mother had put me to bed and had her meal, she decided that she could not go to sleep with Beany-eye roaming round, so she decided to sit up and wait for his return. Since he had come uninvited into the house and had remained stubbornly sitting in the kitchen after she had told him to leave, it seemed to her possible that he would try to break in. It would not be difficult for him to do so through one of the windows, but fortunately the bedroom doors were very thick with solid bolts on the inside, and both she and I would be perfectly safe unless he set the house on fire. In any emergency it would, however, be much better if she were dressed and knew what was happening, and in any case she was feeling too uneasy to go to sleep. So she sat up. To pass the time she took up a book of stories by the new man who was writing now in Russia, and

BEANY-EYE

opened it at one called 'Ward Number 6.' The slightly quizzical and sceptical lines round her mouth slowly vanished; she read more slowly and appreciatively as Tchekhov's intention came home to her. It was terrible; it was scarifying — but it was a masterpiece with a most biting moral. Breathlessly, with a rather childish smile and parted lips, she read on.

She had been very much alarmed when Mabel had come flying to meet her on her return and had whispered in a distraught manner that Beany-eye was in the kitchen. 'What has he done?' she had asked.

'Nothing, madam. Only kept on staring,' answered Mabel.

'What has he said?'

'Nothing, madam. He just came in without saying anything and has been watching every move I made. He asked me for a cup of tea.'

Without waiting, my mother had marched into the kitchen and had said: 'Go out of the house, at once, Joe. Go up to the stable.'

She had not said anything more. Those words had come out almost owing to the impetus of her entry into the room. The bright light of the lamp had dazzled her and she had stood frowning and peering at the half-seen figure in the chair beyond. He had stared back at her, but he had not replied, and she had felt suddenly that a man who did not

BEANY-EYE

answer when spoken to like that was extremely dangerous. At that moment I had come into the room and, surprised at seeing him there, had called out the country greeting: 'What cheer, Joe?' And Beany-eye, who had leaned forward menacingly, had subsided with a low: 'Hullo, Sonny, what cheer?'

Directly my mother heard my voice, she whirled round, caught me by the shoulders and pushed me in front of her out of the room. Beany-eye sat there for three-quarters of an hour more before he went. She had felt the sudden danger, the hatred of the man, but it did not occur to her that by ordering him out of the house she had been repeating his mother's action, that for a moment she had been seen as the frowning, bent, implacable female who had locked him out of his own home, had set the police on him and, perjuring herself against her own flesh and blood in court, had thrust him into gaol.

It was those memories which had suddenly blazed up and become actual events of the present rather than any defiance of my mother which had led to Beany-eye's remaining sunk in the chair beside the kitchen fire. His mood was not at all defiant but was one of profound gloom; he had been sitting tongue-tied, searching for words which would link Mabel with him, would make her sit on his knees and wreath her arms round his neck.

BEANY-EYE

If he had found the magic words she would have followed him out of the back door, and, as they approached it, the stable would have changed into a little cottage with a kettle singing on the hob and a red geranium trained across the lattice window, while a caged goldfinch fluttered and sang. He longed for the miracle, but his whisky-roughened tongue lay like a piece of wood in his mouth.

Violent passions had started up at my mother's words; a longing for revenge and a queer feeling of shame and of confusion which always came over him when he thought of how his mother had treated him. No longer staring at Mabel, but gloomily thinking of the old memory, from which he had been free for several weeks, he sat on until he suddenly remembered where he was and, full of sudden contrition, had hurried out, ready to face his private fiend rather than to trespass further and frighten the women in his master's house.



My mother finished 'Ward Number 6' and put down the Russian book with her mind still full of the ghastly little hospital and of the dreadful end of the bored doctor who could not be bothered to improve things, but who sat at home reading about Lister's discoveries with delight, while his own wards were never free from erysipelas. Then

BEANY-EYE

suddenly she remembered why she was sitting up and at once blew out the lamp beside her and drew back the curtain.

'How funny one is!' she reflected. 'Dicky and I may really be in danger from that man — yet I would not miss this for anything.'

It was a silver night; not a breath of wind stirred; it was so quiet that if a rabbit had hopped through the hedge she would have heard it. But the only sounds which came were the heavy snorts of a distant engine and the knocking together of the buffers of a goods train faster and faster, in geometrical progression, from miles away across the weald of Kent.

'I shall tell James that I shall not stay here any longer unless he gets rid of Beany-eye,' she repeated over and over to herself. 'Not for anything in the world will I consent to pass another night like this.' Yet, as she said it, she knew that not for anything in the world would she have missed the thrill of looking out of the darkened room into the brilliant moonlight. Hours went by; the shadow of the house changed and lengthened, and then suddenly she heard a voice not far away and the hair began to prickle on her head. It was Beany-eye. She stared fixedly until her eyes watered; she sat without breathing until she had to gasp. The voice came again, wandering, threatening, indistinct, and then loud and genially argu-

BEANY-EYE

mentative. Silence fell. In maudlin, reminiscent tones it began again, and stopped. A dark figure appeared in the moonlight by the stable door and disappeared. And then, to my mother's immense relief, a light suddenly appeared in the stable window. Beany-eye had struck a match. It went out, another light flickered and grew as he lighted his candle, died down and almost vanished and then burnt up brightly. A few minutes later it went out suddenly. My mother watched for a little longer, then with a triumphant feeling of security and a determination to expel Beany-eye directly my father returned, she slipped out of the darkened room to my bedroom, bolted the door and listened to my steady breathing. Next morning Beany-eye only came to the house once for water and worked all day in the most exemplary manner.

When my father came home he said that he had been thinking about Joe Starling's future. It was obvious that they must get rid of him, but he had decided to try and set him up in some little trade.

'If I just give him the sack he won't get another job and will get into a brawl and be sent to prison again. And I shall be morally responsible. A very little help now might save him from becoming an habitual criminal.'

So my mother withdrew her ultimatum about

BEANY-EYE

leaving the house, and my father agreed to get rid of Beany-eye as soon as possible and promised that in any case he would not be away for a night in London until the fellow had gone.

Next morning my father went up to the stable directly after breakfast and found Beany-eye waiting for him; he had finished the rough espalier trellis of ash-poles the day before and was pretending to scrape up the mud on the path. There was a pain in his stomach and a nasty taste in his mouth and he had felt so bad when he woke up that he wondered if he had been poisoned. Then the thought went away. He was embarrassed by the knowledge of guilt as my father approached. He knew what was coming; he was going to get the sack and that would be the end.

'Joe,' said my father, 'have you ever thought you would like to be a hawker buying old iron and rabbit-skins?'

Beany-eye looked at my father to see whether he were serious, but his face remained wooden and expressionless.

'Yes, that's what I want, Sir. That's what I've always fancied.'

'You're too rough, Joe, and too independent. People get tired of having you about. But if you had a donkey, or a pony, and travelled round the country you wouldn't spend too long in one place and everyone would be glad to see you and sell

BEANY-EYE

you their old bottles and old iron. For example, we've a lot of old bottles behind the stable.'

They walked round together to look at the pile of empty wine-bottles in the dark space behind the tarred weatherboard of the building. It is extraordinary what an enormous pile of empty bottles accumulates if you are in the habit of drinking claret in the evening.

'You can start off with these as part of your stock. Not worth very much but you'll get a few shillings for them,' said my father.

'D'you mean I might 'ave them, Sir, and as you would set me up with a pony too?' Beany-eye asked in an awestruck whisper.

'Yes,' answered my father, who was feeling rather embarrassed at being regarded as a benefactor for giving away a heap of bottles.

'I'll see what I can do about getting a pony and cart this morning. You can move these bottles right away and start tarring the back of the stable as your last job. The trees drip here and you can get it tarred before you go. I've seen a good many pieces of old iron lying about in the stable,' he went on. 'You can gather all of them up and I daresay they will fetch a little too.'

The suggestion of a pony and cart, of embarking upon the life of a rabbit-skin and bottle man had seemed to Beany-eye to open a window into Heaven. Such a trade had often seemed to him

BEANY-EYE

the most desirable that a man could follow; it offered every opportunity of casual bliss: camping up by-roads among the ash-poles where the wood-pigeons nest, doing a bit of poaching, and a trade in whip-handles, in holly and mistletoe at Christmas, primroses in spring and potted ferns in summer. He would be always out of doors, always moving on from place to place—and then there was a gold-mine in it too! Nobody wants to be bothered with their old bottles and their rabbit-skins and few people realise what money they fetch! He would be making money all the time, be putting it by. Why, he could take a woman along with him; find the right girl, marry her and live steady.

No suggestion could have been closer to Beany-eye's secret desires. Yet for that very reason, it was unfortunate. An inner voice told him that it was a mockery; that it was too good to be true; that he would never be free to live the life of which he dreamed. It was nonsense to pretend that he could. And yet my father's words, coming so unexpectedly, moved him almost to tears. A feeling of gratitude and of tenderness, the sense that he could not bear that there should be so much goodness, overcame him. But directly my father had gone down to the house, Beany-eye's feelings underwent a complete change.

Supposing it was all talk, just to fool him?

BEANY-EYE

They wanted to get rid of him; directly he had tarred the back of the old stable he was to go, to clear out. The bottles were just a bait. He had got to move them out of the way to tar the stable wall. There would be no more talk of setting him up with them then. And what had he meant when he said that there was *a lot of old iron lying about*? What did he know? What had he got into his head? Had that blasted young bastard been spying on him? Why hadn't the kid been near him all day yesterday? They thought they were very sharp, they did. Planning to get him to sell his *old iron* and then they'd have got him where they wanted. But they would find that he'd got a headpiece on him too, even if he weren't no scholar. Dirty sods! Buy him a pony and cart, not likely!

Yet the current did not flow all that way. Even while these thoughts raced through his mind, he was believing in his new life and was planning how he would take his pony up the steep track off the Pilgrim's Way and stay for a night or two in the old chalk-pit.

A few minutes later my father went back to the stable and said: 'I'm just going into Bratley and while I'm there, Joe, I'll see if I can hear of a pony or donkey and cart. I'll see if your friend Charles at "The Greyhound" knows of one cheap.' And then he told Beany-eye to start moving the

BEANY-EYE

bottles at once and begin tarring the back of the stable.

When he was alone, Beany-eye tried to put the thing out of his mind, for his thoughts went racing to and fro so that they hurt his head. He stooped down to pick up the bottles and gathered an armful of them.

'Beauties,' he said to himself. 'It's these that fetch the money. Wrap them in sacking and lay them on some old straw when I put 'em on the cart.'

Very tenderly he laid them on a patch of grass near the woodpile. The bottles lay there and looked lovely, shining in the winter sunshine. A robin came and settled near. Faith in the future came back to him and for half an hour or so he worked carefully, shifting the bottles four or five at a time and laying them down gently on the turf. He was very happy and whistled gently as he worked.

'I had better heat the tar and use it hot,' he thought. 'Then it will be all ready when I'm through with the bottles.'

He found an old bit of newspaper and collected an armful of twigs and chips from the chopping-block, fetched out the bucket of tar, stirred in some kerosene oil to dilute it, sprinkled some more kerosene on the sticks of his fire and lit it.

The flame roared up and caught the sticks, caught the kerosene he had spilt down the side of

BEANY-EYE

the tar bucket and began to flare on the top of the tar. Beany-eye swore with surprise, dashed at the bucket, seized it and carried it off the fire and then sought to blow out the flames, but got a breath of hot, tarry smoke that sent him reeling backwards coughing. He had singed his fingers and, catching hold of a sack, began swiping at the bucket until, more by luck than skill, he had put out the flames. About half the tar was spilt. This misadventure filled him with fury; rounding the corner of the stable, he stared with surprise and anger at the remaining heap of bottles and, picking them up, began throwing them on to the heap which he had moved already. Occasionally one bottle would fall by chance on the earth and, if it were stout, would not be broken. But most of the bottles fell with a crash of glass, shivering the bottle below it on the heap and flying in splinters itself. The sound of the breaking glass was delightful and soon Beany-eye was throwing the bottles hard and taking aim. Only when one of them did not break, he would curse it and aim to hit it with the next. So he would learn them to play the fool and monkey with him. He was to tar the back of the stable and go. Well, he would, and be damned to them. He threw the last bottles in a rain.

Leaning out of an upstairs window, my mother listened angrily to the sound of breaking glass. The bare idea of anyone's smashing bottles in our

BEANY-EYE

garden where I ran barefoot in summer was detestable — and these were the bottles with which James was going to set Beany-eye up in trade! A fine bottle man indeed!

But she did not go up to the stable herself; James would have to deal with the situation when he returned. But my father was a long time coming back; we had lunch without him, and by the middle of the afternoon Beany-eye, having roughly daubed the back of the stable and used up what was left of the tar, turned the black and dripping bucket upside down on the projecting upright ash-pole of the espalier trellis and, putting on his jacket, set out to go to the nearest pub.

My father met him outside the gate and told him to come back with him, since he had various things to say. Frank Charles knew of a greengrocer with a pony to sell for five pounds. Joe was to go and see it and, if he arranged to buy it, my father would pay the greengrocer direct. When he caught sight of the tar bucket, my father frowned; then he caught sight of the pile of broken glass. My father had a hot temper which flared up easily and he would have flown into a rage for much less than that. One bottle smashed on purpose would have been quite enough. But here there were fourteen or fifteen dozen bottles with only about half a dozen amongst them which had not been wantonly smashed! For several hours my father had been

BEANY-EYE

busied on Joe's behalf; he had made enquiries about a hawker's licence and had pushed his bicycle up the North Downs to see an old lady who had a donkey to sell, but who, when it came to the point, did not wish to part with it unless my father could promise it would have a good home with children.

He looked at the heap of shattered bottles and saw the wreckage of his plans. The unfortunate fellow stood there beside him—but there was nothing to blame him for. The folly was my father's own for trying to help a poor incorrigible. Joe was not to blame because he was not fitted to play the part for which my father had cast him. It was clear, of course, that if he had possessed the capacity to be a rag-and-bone man, he would already have become one.

Yet if he were not furious with Joe, my father's feelings were wounded and he was angry with himself; so deeply vexed indeed that it was some time before he spoke.

Beany-eye meanwhile was very uneasy and, at last, walking up to the heap, he pulled out one or two unbroken bottles and one or two that had only lost their necks.

'These ones are all right, Sir,' he said.

'You must go,' said my father. 'Get your things together now, take your money and be off. If the greengrocer's pony suits you, send the man

BEANY-EYE

to me here and I will pay him. I have promised that, but I won't do anything more after that. And you must go now at once and you must not come back.'

Beany-eye began to talk rapidly and hoarsely; he was not ungrateful; he didn't want to go away; he had never meant any harm.

'Some of they bottles broke, so I finished 'em off. Honest, Sir, I never meant to break them.'

My father did not appear to be listening; he took the spade and began digging a hole to bury the bottles.

'Put your things together, Joe. You've got to move out now.'

But Beany-eye still had a great deal to say about mysterious people, old didikays and ill-wishers at Mitcham Fair, but my father was restive and frequently interrupted him. Digging made him feel rather savage and out of breath, and when Beany-eye tried to take the spade from him, he turned on him sharply.

'Hurry up now. I want to lock up and see the last of you.'

When he had finally got rid of Joe and finished burying the broken glass, he fetched a new padlock from the house and looked into the stable before locking up. Phaugh! How the place stank! Well, that was the end of a strange episode.

He turned and looked at the woods, already

BEANY-EYE

almost in darkness and, as he did so, caught sight of the empty tar-bucket turned upside down, but still dribbling a little tar on the upright of the espalier. At the sight of it, all the suppressed irritation which had been accumulating, and all the feelings of rage which he would naturally have given way to about the broken bottles, flared up in sudden fury. He jumped up on the rail and removed the bucket, but as he did so the flash of anger was over and he put the bucket down gently, almost absent-mindedly, on the ground.

Joe could have only just reached the top of the post; he must have hoisted the bucket there as a symbol of defiance, as a sort of piratical black flag, and while my father rubbed his tarry fingers on his handkerchief, he wondered what did the colour black stand for? What was the anti-social significance of the pirate's flag and the priest's cassock and the uniform of the blackguard? To-morrow was the day of the Queen's funeral and millions of people would be wearing black, he would be wearing it himself. Judges wore a black cap and a black flag was hoisted over the prison after an execution. Each of these symbols was, in its own way, the enemy of fecundity and life. Each preyed on the fair, the simple, the innocent . . . why . . . what the dickens . . . each of them symbolised Pluto ravishing Persephone! And then, suddenly, what for an instant had seemed

BEANY-EYE

excitingly interesting, seemed flat and dull. He had rediscovered that black was the livery of Satan. Certainly that was not much to excite himself about. His mind went back to Joe and he blamed himself for not having listened more carefully to what he had said.

The poor fellow had been in a very odd state of mind and one which would have repaid study. There had been a sulky, wounded look on his wooden face, as he left. What was the use of his observing the psychology of crowds when the psychology of the individual was so baffling? Just why had Beany-eye smashed the bottles? To prove his independence? To show that he could not be helped? Or because he felt his very existence threatened by pity and unconsciously knew that he must protect himself against it?

Well, he had done his best. He would pay for the pony and cart and Joe would barter them away in a week or two for whisky—and the episode would be over. He regretted that he had not observed the poor chap more carefully and made notes.

Part Two

NEXT morning I was woken by the sounds of my parents moving about the house: it was a little after dawn. My bed was warm and I snuggled closer wondering for a moment why I had been waked early. Just as I was going to sleep again my mother came into the room and I heard the front door slam and my father's long and rushing footsteps go past the house.

'He's going to Queen Victoria's funeral,' said my mother. He was catching the milk train to London so as to get a good position from which to watch the cortège go past. A description of this event would form part of the article he was writing on crowd psychology.

He was a little late in starting and would have to run for five or six hundred yards through the park on the way to the station, but all the same he knew quite well that he would catch the train. There was a blackbird singing and as he looked at the red streak in the east shining through the branches of the Scotch pine, it occurred to him to wish that he had got a black hat: another example of the uniform of Pluto and of the rape of Perse-

BEANY-EYE

phone on a lovely morning of earliest spring. 'But I shall take my hat off of course,' and as that reflection came to him (he could not say whether it followed or preceded it) he suddenly perceived the sinister Plutonic object which had first set his thoughts wandering upon the subject. There, aloft upon the tallest upright of the fence, was the black tar bucket, Beany-eye's piratical flag! Joe had returned.

My father looked at it with an almost incredulous, wrathful eye. He had been right to see it as a symbol, as a flag defiantly flouting him. But when had Beany-eye put it up again? It had not been there last thing at night and, in the dark, Beany-eye was scarcely likely to have noticed that it had been taken down. He therefore must have just put it up and could not be far off. My father walked up to the stable door; it was padlocked on the outside just as he had left it the night before, but, without asking himself why, he was convinced that Beany-eye was inside. And, without thinking that he would miss his train, he turned and ran back to the house.

As I was slipping back into my sleep I heard his rapid footsteps, the heavy trot breaking suddenly into a lunging walk, the front door creak and slam and my mother's voice saying aloud: 'What has he forgotten now?' Then, once again the door creaked and was slammed and the hurried

BEANY-EYE

footsteps came round below my bedroom window.

'He'll certainly miss his train,' said my mother.

He went straight up the garden path with the key of the new padlock in his hand, but, as he reached the top of it, he caught sight once more of the small barrel-shaped black tar bucket inverted upon the post and a feeling of intense irritation came over him. Its appearance there was not only annoying as showing that Joe had come back, but was in itself insufferable. The first thing, therefore, was to take the tar bucket down. He stepped on to the bottom rail of the trellis, reached up and removed it. Then he went straight to the stable, unlocked the padlock and opened the door. Though he had fetched the key with so much certainty, he no longer expected to find Beany-eye and had not thought out what he should say to him when he did. The first uprush of his anger had subsided; fetching the key and removing the tar bucket had somewhat cooled his irritation.

As the door opened he saw Joe half huddled, half crouching on the floor and noticed the broken panes and woodwork of the skylight. He had scarcely time to say angrily 'So you've broken in!' when he saw Beany-eye spring up with the axe in his hand and hurl himself upon him. There was a flash of steel and a deep roar as the man leapt at

BEANY-EYE

him: then my father slammed the door hard in Joe's face and turned round and bolted for the house. He could hear the man's roars behind him as he ran.

Once more I was nearly asleep when the sounds of men running hard woke me suddenly and completely. I knew at once that there were now two men and that they were about the length of the house wall apart, a distance of perhaps seven or eight yards. I heard the sound of the front door opened and banged shut and locked and then another terrific bang upon it and a rather high whistling cry of my mother's name.

Already she was in the passage and I ran after her quickly to the top of the stairs and looked down at my father. He was standing half-way up the staircase looking up at us, holding on to the banisters in one hand and supporting himself with the other hand outstretched against the wall, and seemed as though he had started to run upstairs, but could get no further. His appearance was extraordinary. I had often seen him gasping for breath after a game of hockey, or during a paper-chase, but never thus. His face was green, the green of cabbage-water. Yet this remarkable colour was obviously not a sign of illness, for his expression was one of violent excitement; his eyes were brilliant and there was no other sign of horror or fear. As soon as he had breath enough to gasp

BEANY-EYE

out more than 'Joe's outside. Raving mad,' he said: 'Get yourself and the boy dressed quickly. We must act at once. The postman and the milkboy will be coming to the house and we must head them off.'

I was hurried back into the bedroom and helped to get into some of my clothes, but my mother left me for a minute and, hearing the rush of feet outside, I at once ran to the window and looked out. Beany-eye had been hammering violently for some little time with the knocker on the front door, but suddenly the barking of the dogs had attracted his attention and he charged like a bull from the porch across the flower-beds into the middle of the grass plot. There was intense ferocity and determination in this violent rush which ended abruptly, leaving him stranded without a purpose, standing with straddled legs and the baulked look of a Rugby player when the ball has been punted to the furthest corner of the field just as he was reaching it. It was the end of this rush and this sudden stop which was the first I saw of him and, as he turned his head slowly round, I was horrified. The Joe I had known was gone and in his place there was a new Beany-eye, a creature made frightful by his terrific energy. I do not suppose that at that age I had ever heard of electricity, but if I were to describe the man's appearance now I would say that he looked as if he were holding

BEANY-EYE

on to a live wire and dancing while he was being burned up to death.

The dogs, which had been applauding the tremendous noise of the door-knocker, provided a distraction, for they followed up Beany-eye's rush and began to leap up at him. Beany-eye shouted and charged again and the dogs leaped and bounded about him in delighted play. But suddenly he caught Nietzsche and, with a careless, effortless motion, sent the reddish-yellow body squirming and spinning round frantically, high into the air above his head. Up and up the wretched animal spun while Beany-eye charged underneath it in pursuit of Puppsie.

That moment was horrible, was unforgettable, was imprinted for ever in my mind. My dog was being killed and I could do nothing to save him — and I seemed to be gazing for an eternity at the dog spinning and twisting high in the air and the madman charging like a bull beneath him. But somehow, in falling, Nietzsche succeeded in stopping his spin and landing on all fours on the grass, and he was not injured though he had been thrown up quite sixteen feet. The startled and winded creature was hardly on the ground and I had only had time to realise that he was still alive and had not broken his back, when it was Puppsie's turn. He was not thrown so high but he seemed to be hurt by the fall and gave a loud yelp of pain.

BEANY-EYE

Nietzsche had fallen in silence. The spirit of the two dogs was a good deal shaken. They began barking again, then were silent, but they kept their distance and when Beany-eye turned and charged them, they ran swiftly to one side, keeping always out of his reach and then, when he dashed off, stood for a moment puzzled before their excitement swept them away to follow him and share in his game—but always from a distance. My mother's return called me away from the windows; I was alarmed for the safety of the dogs and anxious that they should be saved from Beany-eye—of whom, now that I had seen him, I was afraid. Yet my chief emotion was not fear, but horror: horror and curiosity. I pulled on my shoes quicker than ever before in my life. Just after my mother and I had got downstairs, Beany-eye, who had tired of the dogs, began knocking again on the front door. It was very solidly made of two thicknesses of wood and studded with screws in a pseudo-mediaeval manner and there was a heavy iron chain to hold it as well as the lock, and we were indeed glad of these defences at that moment.

My father had already made his plan and stationed my mother and me at the back door while he asked Beany-eye what he wanted at the front door. Beany-eye demanded food and my father came past us and fetched him something out

BEANY-EYE

of the kitchen on a small plate. I can remember that there was a small table-knife on the plate and that my father carried it carefully, so that the knife should not slide off.

'When you hear me unlocking the door and opening it,' he whispered to my mother, 'you must unlock and open this door and you and Dicky must make a dash for it up the steps by the back way and as fast as you can to warn everyone and fetch help from Shirley Gate. Get all the men you can find to come down here.' He went down the passage, balancing the knife on the plate, and shut the door after him.

'Here you are, Joe, I've brought you some breakfast,' he said, and listened for a moment. There was a queer snuffling sound outside in the porch that did not seem to come from a man. Then there was silence. My father unchained the door, listened for a moment to the sound of my mother opening the back door, then, afraid that Beany-eye might hear it too, he hastily turned the key and pulled the door wide open.

Beany-eye had been standing so close to the door that his nose must have been touching it and he stared from about a foot off into the face of the man he had been hunting. But the five minutes which had passed since the oak door had been slammed to and locked in his face, had been long enough for him to lose sight of his original purpose.

BEANY-EYE

His face was running with sweat and the muscles of his face kept working, knotting themselves up in unconscious torment. He stared at my father in a puzzled way as though he had forgotten something important.

'Here's some breakfast, Joe,' said my father. 'You can eat it here,' and he held out the plate. Beany-eye took it, but scarcely looked at it, and next moment the plate was dropped suddenly and smashed on the brick floor of the porch. For a moment there was agony in his face and then, with a cunning look, he pulled a sailor's knife out of his pocket and gazed fixedly at the face in front of him.

'I think you had better have this, Sir,' he said quietly and handed the knife over.

'Oh, all right,' answered my father, taking it and, passing his hand inside the door, slipped it on to the window ledge. Having disposed of the knife, Beany-eye had freed himself of the last vestige of responsibility and with a strangled howl rushed out of the porch into the middle of a flower-bed. My father pulled the door to gently behind him and followed quietly down the steps. The man had run out again into the middle of the grass plot. A stream of jumbled words and blasphemies bubbled from his mouth; he waved his clenched fists, marched up and down, and occasionally, standing in one spot, performed the little skipping

BEANY-EYE

dance characteristic of boxers in the corners of the ring. Suddenly he would whirl about in his tracks and howl menaces at the imaginary enemies by whom he saw himself surrounded. The dogs, which had vanished, reappeared round the corner of the house and stood watching him fixedly, their ears cocked, their tails held low and gently wagging in the effort to propitiate him; at intervals they whined unpleasantly. Looking at them and seeing for the first time their absorbed interest in Beany-eye's insanity, my father felt profoundly scandalised. It would be hard to say whether he was afraid lest the dogs' ideas about man should be upset, or whether his concern was for the dignity of the human species. But it seemed to him essential to shut the dogs up in the house at once. He began calling to Nietzsche softly, but the little dog only half-turned his head towards him and, looking back at the figure of Beany-eye, whimpered violently.

He called louder and then Beany-eye stopped his gesticulations, looked at the dog and shouted to it. Nietzsche hesitated, shifted his front legs and whimpered again, and Beany-eye, suddenly furious, began cursing the dog and looking about him for some weapon. My father called the dog again, exasperated, and going up to it, took it by the collar and dragged it with him back to the porch. Without looking round, or standing up-

BEANY-EYE

right, although he heard Beany-eye's shouts and oaths and felt him close behind him, he opened the door and swung the dog into the passage. When he looked round, he saw Beany-eye had somehow got the axe again into his hands and was standing on the steps.

'I want you to go down to the rabbit-holes. We must see about getting ferrets,' my father said. 'Go down there now at once, Joe. Leave the axe.' He was just saying the first thing that came into his head, though there was a basis of truth for his words. He had given a neighbour permission to come and ferret the holes that afternoon.

The expression on Joe's face did not change as my father repeated 'Rabbits . . . Ferrets . . .' But, seeing a look of suspicion that crossed it at the words 'Leave the axe,' he immediately added 'Take the spade.' The spade happened to be standing in the porch, where my father had left it after burying the broken bottles the evening before.

'A spade is as dangerous a weapon as an axe,' flashed through his mind. But Beany-eye dropped the one and picked up the other and, turning round, walked rather unsteadily towards the bottom of the garden.

Picking up the axe, my father slipped quietly into the house, locked the door after him and, still holding the axe, ran out of the back door and, by the back way, unseen up to the stable.

BEANY-EYE

There he looked in and found Beany-eye's whole armoury had been laid out in a semicircle on the floor with the handles towards the centre and the points radiating out. The discovery horrified him, for it was a proof that Joe had been mad for some time, for he could hardly believe that a sane man had been making preparations for going insane — of such a nature and on such a scale. It showed that he had not just gone out of his mind for the moment, as the result of being taken by surprise, but that he had been mad for days past. If he suddenly began to behave normally, it would not prove that he was not still as mad as when he was collecting this arsenal.

'I must get rid of these somehow,' thought my father. 'And I'll run up to Shirley Gate and see what they are doing.' He was scared lest Beany-eye should return and find him in the stable, and gathered up an armful of billhooks, swaphooks, hatchets, a big hammer and a scythe as fast as he could and ran hastily out of the stable. The scythe slipped and the heel of the blade caught his shoulder, cutting the cloth of his black coat. He paused and rearranged his armful, knowing that if Beany-eye caught him at that moment, it would be impossible to avoid a fight to the death. Then he went on his way more carefully.

BEANY-EYE

Directly we heard my father speak to Beany-eye, my mother opened the door and we ran out. It is very steep at the back of our house and steep up through the wood, but fear kept us going until we were well away. Then my mother began to find it impossible to run any further and I turned and waited for her. This annoyed her and she kept waving her hand to me and gasping: 'Run on. Don't wait. Run on.'

I remember reflecting that it was absurd of her to think that I was in any danger, for I knew that no grown-up man could catch me when I was running through the thick undergrowth, and the wood stretched on all sides of us. I had only to dart off the path and I should be safe. I was concerned about my mother's safety and did not wish to desert her until we reached our neighbours. I do not think I felt any anxiety about what might happen to my father. At last my mother did succeed in making me run on about fifty yards ahead, but when I got to a turn in the path I waited until she came into sight. Finally we roused our neighbours together.

Mr Outram, on whom I think my mother had been rather relying, as he was a farm foreman as strong as an oak tree, had been gone to work five minutes, and Mrs Outram, a frail, flat-chested woman, whose angular outlines and straight lower jaw bone made her resemble a piece of sculpture

BEANY-EYE

from Benin City, hurried round to the large cottage next door inhabited by Mr Jupp, the builder and undertaker. Then she hurried back to say that he would put on his boots in a minute and would step round. In the meantime she sent her girl, Winnie, to tell the Mendelsohns' deaf coachman to step round quick.

We were still waiting for Mr Jupp to put on his boots, when an awe-inspiring figure appeared and began hullooing to us from the edge of the wood. It was my father and his arms were filled with scythes, axes and choppers of every description and he stood exhorting us to come and help him and shouting, to me at any rate, to keep away. Why he had brought as much of Beany-eye's armoury as he could carry, a distance of a quarter of a mile, when he could just as safely have dumped it all behind the first tree, or into the first patch of bracken, I cannot tell and I remember that it impressed me strangely at the time.

'Help me to get rid of these,' he shouted at my mother, who was reluctant to start hurrying again and who was, I fancy, suffering also from an emotional reaction. The edged tools with which he bristled seemed to cling to him; he seemed almost to be magnetised and to need help before he could drop them on the ground or throw them over the paling into the Mendelsohns' garden. But suddenly the responsibility of leaving Beany-

BEANY-EYE

eye was too much for him; he dropped the armfuls of ironmongery with a great effort and, making a gesture of exhortation, ran back along the path to the house.

Just before he turned the corner, he stopped and called out: 'I'll bring the rest if I can.'

Shortly after this Mr Jupp appeared, looking very fussy and flustered; the cadaverous deaf coachman joined him and, while they set off together at a moderate pace, looking like the King of Spades attended by the Frog Footman, my mother and I began picking up the abandoned weapons and dropping them over the black paling into the Mendelsohns' shrubbery.

I think it was Mrs Outram who suddenly said that the policeman ought to be fetched, and I was at once dispatched to fetch him and set off at a trot, down the long stretch of Oakley Hill. I was delighted to be fetching the policeman since it was a position of trust, and, when at last I reached the row of new brick cottages on one of which there was the blue enamelled sign 'Police', I rushed up and knocked vigorously. The woman of the house listened to me doubtfully, then called her handsome young lodger from his breakfast. He came to the door in his socks, heard the first headlines of my story and at once went back and put on his boots, and while he was getting into his tunic, buckling his belt and putting on his helmet,

BEANY-EYE

I began to enlarge on Joe's chasing my father with an axe and throwing the dogs into the air.

'Who is this fellow Joe?' he asked. 'It's not Beany-eye, is it?'

'Yes,' I said, and the young policeman's cheeks went a deeper shade of red. He was a very young policeman, so young that, though I was only eight years old, his youth was obvious to me. He did not look at all a match for Beany-eye and I have no doubt I made remarks on how extremely dangerous the latter was. Just after we had set off together up Oakley Hill, the policeman said: 'I've got his medicine for him here,' and showed me a short black truncheon of ebony, or *lignum vitae*, at which I gazed with intense admiration before he slipped it back into the long pocket down the seam of his right trouser-leg.



My father walked slowly out of the wood down the garden path; he had a stitch in his side and was still rather out of breath, and it occurred to him that he might as well get his wind back before he took on Beany-eye again. He looked through the fringe of bushes down to the house, across the irregular clearing that Beany-eye had hacked in the shaw and considered, for the first time, with a critical eye, that area of devastation: the tangled

BEANY-EYE

heaps of torn-down undergrowth, the stumps standing up in jagged splinters; everything revealed the madman's touch. The feeling of deep irritation with himself for helping Beany-eye, from which he had been suffering for two or three days, suddenly left him and he saw the whole episode with detachment, as though it were already over. Then, with a sense of relief, he walked cautiously to the top of the garden and looked about him. Joe was not visible; he was neither in the stable nor behind it. There were still a large number of dangerous implements on the stable floor and my father picked up a pair of hedge clippers, half of a pair of shears, a pruning saw, a pickaxe and an old hay-knife. He put his head out cautiously. Beany-eye was still nowhere in sight and my father ran to the hedge and threw the things over into the next field. While he was doing this, it occurred to him that Beany-eye might have broken into the house and be watching him out of one of the windows. As he turned back he heard the sound of footsteps above him in the wood and, gazing up into it, he saw that there were two men standing and watching him. It was Mr Jupp and the coachman who were reconnoitring the position. My father's actions had seemed to them suspicious and they were by no means sure that he was not the madman and that Mrs Outram had not got the story wrong.

BEANY-EYE

'Good morning,' my father shouted. 'Come on down to the house,' and waving a beckoning finger he turned and went down the path. The sun was shining, the sky clear and blue, the weather very mild and pleasant, and the beds bordering the path spring-like with snowdrops and yellow aconites. Just as he got to the bottom of the path, Beany-eye came round the corner of the house holding his head in his hand, and, from the way in which he walked, it was obvious that he was ill. My father at once called out to him to avoid startling him, and Joe, looking up, at once slipped his hand into his pocket and gripped the handle of a hammer. He walked right up to my father and then stopped, looking at him in a slightly confused way.

'I've been wanting you to speak for me, Sir.'

Then seeing the two figures at the top of the path he leaped sideways over the flower-bed, gazing suspiciously at them. The two men, seeing my father standing close beside Beany-eye, came slowly down towards them. Jupp was a short, thick man with full rosy cheeks and lips framed in a black beard and whiskers, whose eyes always twinkled merrily; the deaf coachman was tall, angular and deferential and his face always wore the sad expression of a self-respecting monkey. So completely had habit moulded the faces of these men that at that moment Jupp's face still wore

BEANY-EYE

its habitual expression of bustling and sensual self-satisfaction and the coachman's one of nobly martyred respectability, although at their advance Beany-eye had capered off and, suddenly pulling out his secret hammer, had brandished it in their direction. However, in a few moments it became obvious that he no longer saw or heeded them. A world unknown to, and unseen by them and by my father, had become visible; he screamed suddenly, plucked at invisible objects crawling on his face and arms and chest, hurling them to the ground and stamping on them; then ran a wildly swerving course; stopped, plucked at himself and stamped again, then, screaming with horror, tore handfuls of air from about his neck, his face, his ears, and flung them with tremendous violence from him.

The deaf coachman was the first to speak.

'I've never seen nobody taken like that afore,' he said with melancholy disapproval. 'He doesn't know what he's doing, Sir. You can't do nothing with him till he comes to himself.'

My father nodded in exasperated agreement.

'I don't know that we could handle him, Sir. He'd take a deal of holding,' came the raven's croak. 'I could fetch a pair of old reins, but we should do the job better if we were six men.'

My father shook his head and shouted: 'No, we don't want to use force.'

BEANY-EYE

A vague smile appeared on the sad monkey face. The coachman had not heard and he lifted a cupped hand to his huge membranous ear.

'No,' shouted my father.

'The reins would hold 'im, if you want 'em, Sir.'

'NO.'

The violence of Beany-eye's delirium seemed to be passing off. He no longer ran and fought imaginary assailants, but wandered slowly in circles, muttering with restless irritability. Presently the group watching heard a step behind them; it was the young policeman coming down the path.

Joe at once noticed the uniform and seemed to wake up as though from a dream, brandished the hammer and shouted out threats and abuse. The policeman hesitated and his red face grew scarlet but he continued to approach until my father hastily called to him to go back.

'I'll come and talk to you up at the gate.' He spoke none too soon, for Beany-eye appeared to be preparing a rush and my father thought it best to step out and take him by the arm.

'That's all right, old man. You'll feel better soon,' the ancient formula for helping drunks rose to his lips, and just because it was an ancient formula, one that each side had heard and uttered, the words did not fail to soothe. The idea that perhaps he was only drunk, or that he was thought only to be in difficulties through drink, was a

BEANY-EYE

sudden comfort and Beany-eye caught at the notion, put his hand to his head and turned away. My father found the policeman standing by the gate.

'This isn't my beat,' said the young man. 'This house is in Surrey and you ought to fetch a constable from Bulling Green.'

He was offended by the smile, and the way in which my father said: 'Directly he's a little better I am going to take him in to Bratley and I'll see the sergeant there. You may as well follow behind, only mind you keep out of sight.'

After another half-hour had passed, Beany-eye seemed better and agreed to go to Bratley with my father, but there was at first a suspicious silence between them which it was difficult to break. Beany-eye muttered and grumbled to himself and gazed with his knotty, sweating face full of dark questions at his master, who was racking his brains to start a subject which could get him interested and fix his attention. But remarks on ponies and carts, on travelling round the country, and on Mitcham Fair got them no forwarder. Nothing would distract Beany-eye from his cloudy suspicions. At last they reached Shirley Gate. A group of men and women and children was standing, talking at the cross-roads. The rabbit-catcher, who was afterwards to come down to see what rabbits he could get from our holes, was trying a ferret in the rat-holes by the Outrams' chicken-house.

BEANY-EYE

The policeman, the postman, a butcher's boy with a cart from Oakley, and the gamekeeper were standing in a group which I, dawdling on my way up the hill, had just joined, but directly Beany-eye and my father came out of the wood, we broke up and dispersed; even the keeper with his gun hastily made off between the thick round hedges to Mr Jupp's timber-yard, and when Beany-eye and my father turned the corner by the cross-roads, there was not a living thing in sight except the white ferret looping along the outside of the hedge from one rat-hole to the next.

Joe saw it at once, he loved ferrets, and his suspicions immediately vanished. He remembered that his master had spoken of ferreting: there was the ferret and he could trust him.

'There's a lovely little doe. White as a flower and keeps herself as clean as one. I lay: — the chap that owns her saw me coming along and went off in double-quick time without picking her up. They are all scared of old Beany-eye and they are not so wrong neither.' He gave a silly, triumphant laugh and then he wagged his head at my father.

'That's all right, Sir,' he said in a thick trembling voice. 'I'll do what you tell me.'

The walk to Bratley was therefore a success and Joe grew steadily more normal in the course of it. Yet the two miles through the park took nearly an

BEANY-EYE

hour as Beany-eye kept stopping and once took my father back several hundred yards to show him where he was going to build a cottage for himself so he could settle down and marry.

'I want to live quiet,' he said. 'I've knocked about more than enough. There's no sense to it.'

By the time they reached Bratley, Joe was so much better that my father left him eating a ham sandwich in the street, while he went into the police station to explain matters to the sergeant.

'Joe Starling? Yes, we know 'im of old. 'E's 'is own henemy but I'll 'andle 'im extra carefully. I'll just give 'im a talking-to. You needn't worry, Sir. Just you leave 'im in my 'ands. You don't 'ave to charge 'im. I'll just keep 'im under hobobservation.'

'It was a violent fit of insanity,' said my father, wondering whether he should not have taken Joe direct to a doctor.

'Very likely, Sir. It often is. But if you give 'em a little rope they pull 'emselves together in the ordinary way.'

The fat sergeant raised his mass of solemn flesh which seemed like a vast vegetable swathed in serge, and, taking up his helmet, forced it down over his bald head into the creases of his enormous neck. In the street outside they found Joe staring into a boot shop, and the old sergeant shook a waggish finger at him in greeting.

BEANY-EYE

'What's all this what I've been 'earing about you? And on the day of 'Er Majesty's funeral. 'Aven't you no respect for others? Now young fellow, you answer me this: 'Ow long do these fits of yours generally last?'

Beany-eye, who had been staring at the sergeant with more amusement than hostility, seemed to be annoyed by his last words.

'Fits? What fits? I've never 'ad no fits in my life.'

'Now you come along with me to the end of the town and we'll argue things out together,' said the sergeant.

'It's farcical,' thought my father. 'It's really crazy to leave him with this old fool.' But the sudden temptation was strong. He had only to do what was expected of him, to say good-bye and to turn on his heel and he would be rid of Beany-eye and his responsibility would be over.

'Good-bye, Joe. Good morning, sergeant. Thank you so much.'

And my father was free, walking happily down the street, breathing deep breaths of air into his lungs. Winter seemed suddenly to have changed to spring.

He walked slowly home across the park, stopping to look at a beech tree with a woodpecker's hole in it and surprising a squirrel which had come out from its hibernation and ran across the path

BEANY-EYE

to the bole of the sweet chestnut. Its red fur looked silky in the sun.

By the time he had got back, my mother had hesitatingly returned to the house and I had been sent off under escort to my school, which had begun again two days before when all danger from the measles was over. What bitter resentment I felt when, bursting in late with the great news, I was told to go to my seat, to attend to my work and not to interrupt the lesson! Nothing had ever seemed so meaningless as the piece of dictation which I was supposed to write down, but which I could scarcely listen to; nobody had ever seemed so inhuman and contemptibly fish-like as the mistress.

Good God! The miserable *cow* would not listen when I was telling her that a madman had tried to chop off my father's head and that I was late because I had been employed in fetching the police! What did it matter to her whether my father was murdered? And she lacked the common civility to pretend to take an interest in our survival! Well, I would not pretend to listen to her piffling dictation. In any case my fingers were trembling so with anger that I could hardly make a mark with my pencil.

So thoroughly and so successfully was I snubbed that the little girls and the other boy in the class sided with her and imitated her in the five-minute

BEANY-EYE

interval, when we were supposed to run about. Not one of them would listen to me. The smaller ones found it excruciatingly funny to put their hands over their ears and run away, squeaking gaily: 'Don't tell me. I don't want to hear. No. I don't want to.' Their pigtails flew out disgustingly behind them; their fat legs shone; they were ready to take refuge indoors with Miss Counsel rather than hear me. Only the eldest of the girls, who was busy mastering grown-up technique, listened to a few words and said with mock sympathy: 'How horrid for you! You must have been very, very frightened.'

I was so angry at this treatment that I swore I would never speak another word to them on the subject. Just after I made this vow, Miss Counsel came up and forbade me to mention Beany-eye to any of my school-fellows. Their mothers might not like their hearing about such things. Not all parents would. At this final insult I burst into tears of mortification and had to endure the public humiliation of the sort of hygienic comforting which she administered, of being made to drink a glass of cold water in public and dry my eyes with her handkerchief, since I had not got one of my own.

Just, however, as the last class broke up, at half-past three in the afternoon, I was vindicated. Mabel was standing by the door looking very

BEANY-EYE

flushed and out of breath, with her fringe and her ringlets blown all over her head. Mabel, without her hat and still wearing her kitchen apron, had run all the way to be in time to head me off and warn me that I was still in danger. 'You're not to go home. Joe has broken out again and is roaming round the house roaring at the top of his voice. We could hear him bellowing, over at the cottage. Yes, madam. He has escaped from the police and is at large.'

I left without deigning to speak to any of my school-fellows. We had a madman besieging our house for the second time in one day. They had never had anything of the sort happen in their dull families. And holding my head high and conscious of my superiority, I walked out of the garden gate with Mabel. The other children stood looking after us and I knew that for once in my life I had really scored.



To be cosily sitting by one's fireside again after such a morning and to be feeling not at all the worse for it, seemed extraordinary to my mother; she would not have been surprised if it had laid her up with a violent sick headache. But no! Nothing of the kind; instead of that she was feeling particularly energetic and pleased with life, and

BEANY-EYE

long before Sophy's curiosity was half satisfied, she laid hold of the volume of *Anna Karenina* in the Russian and began ' . . . the old monster says here . . . '

The news of Joe's dementia had spread very quickly to our dear friend and neighbour Sophy Petrovna, and directly she had heard that the coast was clear, that Joe was in the hands of the police, she had put on her galoshes and her fur tippet and had set off up the hill to hear all about it. At lunch she had teased my father and he had teased her back, and after lunch she had settled down to roll herself one cigarette after another and to hear, over the coffee, every detail from my mother. She had heard a great deal, but eventually my mother grew restive; a whole day was being wasted owing to that wretched man, and the Heaven-sent opportunity of getting a Russian opinion on the passages which had been troubling her was being wasted too, because of Sophy's greediness for gossip. So seizing *Anna Karenina* she opened the pages and, as she scanned them hastily, her expression completely changed; all the rather shy, girlish propitiatory warmth left her face and her features assumed a sharp, masterful expression. Sophy was sometimes a little put-out by my mother's manner while some of these special points were being referred to her. For she had a habit of picking out phrases which, though they would

BEANY-EYE

never have attracted attention had one been reading the book for pleasure, were always troublesome. And when she felt that she had solved the problem satisfactorily, my mother would split her explanation into two, and say:

'But you see, Sophy, that what you have said is ambiguous. Does he mean this — or that? He cannot have intended both.'

Meanwhile Sophy puffed at her thin little cigarette, dipped a last lump of sugar in the dregs at the bottom of her coffee-cup, and sucked the liquid out of it through her teeth. There was one thing more she wanted to know about Beany-eye. . . . She lifted her head to ask the question and caught sight, through the little window, of a man coming down the path.

'Le voilà!' she cried and, before my mother could drop the dictionary, she had flown to bolt and chain the back door. Sophy was always adequate to deal with every emergency. She was an old revolutionary and had been accustomed to police raids since her girlhood.

My mother wrung her hands in despair. Oh, it was frightful! Sophy and she were alone in the house. Mabel had run over to the cottage to fetch a loaf of bread, since the baker had not dared come to the house that morning, and she would be coming back at any moment, my father was out somewhere in the wood and would return, quite

BEANY-EYE

unsuspecting, to walk into Beany-eye's arms, and in half an hour I should be starting back from school.

Sophy and my mother stood silent, listening. Then they heard the sound of heavy hobnail boots coming rather unsteadily down the steps; then a silence and then a blundering advance. There was the sound of a hand on the latch and the rattling of the locked door and then, after the door had been tried, an angry knock.

My mother's indignation had been aroused by Joe's daring to try the door and she hurried to it and shouted through it:

'What do you want? You have no business to come back here.'

'I got to find the boss,' Beany-eye answered angrily. 'I've got to see him. I'm fetching my things and he's hidden them away and locked up the stable.'

'He's out,' declared my mother with great energy. 'He's down the Long Walk.'

'No he ain't,' answered Beany-eye. 'I come that way.'

'Then he's gone there since you came by,' replied my mother. 'He said he was calling at Shirley Gate on the way. He must have got talking and did not get into the Long Walk until you had come by. You just missed him.'

Beany-eye hesitated and grumbled at this and

BEANY-EYE

my mother said sharply: 'You had better hurry if you want to catch him.'

Beany-eye still hesitated, then he turned and slowly went round the corner of the house. Half-way up the steps they heard him stop, but they did not look out of the window lest he should see their curiosity and return. At last the footsteps went on again and he came into sight. Sophy watched him till he turned the corner of the stable while my mother locked the front door and bolted all the windows. Then they let themselves out, locking the back door behind them, and rushed as fast as their legs could carry them down to the bottom of the garden and through the wood to the cottage, meeting Mabel on the way, bringing the loaf. It was as well they had not waited longer, for when they paused for a moment in the wood to get their breaths, they could hear Beany-eye shouting angrily in the garden. He had turned back almost at once, partly because he did not believe her story of my father's whereabouts and partly as the result of a singular adventure.

As I have already explained, our house stands beneath a steep woodland hillside the slope of which was then covered with hollies, larch trees and bracken, and a steep path, impracticable for wheeled traffic, leads straight up the hillside between a double row of tall pine trees, the knotted roots of which, crossing the path, break it up into

BEANY-EYE

irregular steps. Anything dropped at the top of this path would infallibly roll down it, and many a parcel or loaf of bread that has slipped from my childish arms have I watched bounding and bouncing from one point in the pathway to another, until at length it has been brought to rest by the bank, beyond the ditch, which marks the limit of our garden.

Beany-eye had reached the bottom of this path and was ascending it, when he came face to face with two children carrying the laundry basket to our house. No sooner did they see him than they uttered piercing shrieks and dropped their burden, which rolled over and over, scattering our clean linen on the pine needles and into the mud and came to rest at Beany-eye's feet, while the children vanished into the undergrowth like rabbits, leaving him staring, first after them and then at the trail of shirts and vests, handkerchiefs and pants.

Beany-eye was deeply shocked by this incident and considered himself greatly affronted by it. Moreover he considered that the responsibility for it was my mother's. He had been aware of her hostility from the first, and he believed that for several days past she had forbidden me his company and it was clear to him that the children only ran from him because of the lies and tales which she had spread. He determined then to return to the house and to have the matter out with her

BEANY-EYE

and to demand that I should be allowed out with him.

'As though I should hurt a child!' he repeated indignantly. 'It's a shame to keep that poor nipper cooped up when he wants to be along of me.'

After picking up one of my mother's night-gowns and dropping it again, he left the washing where it was and ran back to the house, coming in to the garden at the top gate only a moment after Sophy and my mother had fled through the bottom one. He was at that moment in a much uglier frame of mind than he had been since the first few minutes after being disturbed in the morning.

When my mother and Sophy met Mabel they at once dispatched her to head me off on my way back from school, but it was more difficult to warn my father since all that was known was that he would probably be coming back about tea-time. The best thing would be to fetch the police from Bulling Green at once and as soon as she reached the cottage she sent off a girl on a bicycle, while Sophy, doubting her chances of getting back to Oakley, accepted a lift in the milkcart which was just setting off on its round and which would take her to the door of some friends who would put her up for the night. She knew that the bearer of such news as hers would be welcome everywhere. If Beany-eye were to remain at large she would find

BEANY-EYE

it hard to avoid paying a round of visits or entertaining a crowd of visitors.

'Tell everybody you see, Sophy,' said my mother, 'and then something will have to be done about it.'



When Mabel and I went out of the gate, we hardly knew where we were to go to, and I must confess that at first we looked apprehensively round every corner to see whether Beany-eye, axe in hand, were not charging towards us. Instead, however, of any such terrible vision, we soon fell in with a number of familiar figures who were all strolling, at not too brisk a pace, in the same direction as ourselves. Thanks to Sophy on the milk-round, and to my mother's messenger, the story which had already spread some way in the morning, was being thoroughly well diffused and a surprisingly large number of our friends and neighbours were turning out to see what they could for themselves. No doubt their principal object was to satisfy their curiosity, yet it was easy to detect in their embarrassed smiles and warm but shy greetings, that they had come out wishing to afford what help or sympathy they could to my parents. Now that Mabel and I were no longer alone, we did not hesitate to return to her cottage, where we should in all likelihood find my mother

BEANY-EYE

and from which the end of our house and garden was clearly visible. As we progressed, we saw a few of our neighbours on all sides so that the wood seemed to be dotted with people on that dreary February afternoon almost as if it were a Sunday evening in summer. They moved with increasing slowness as they got near our house, and when they actually came in sight of it, they halted.

From a distance of a quarter of a mile across the meadows, our house stood up boldly and since it was on higher ground and the garden sloped towards us, everything in it was open to the view.

There was a queer shyness, a detached expectancy in all the watchers; they were not eager, it appeared, to see Beany-eye close, still less to take any part in dealing with him; they were acting on a herd instinct — but not a very strong one — and were rather embarrassed at being there at all.

One or two of the earlier arrivals spoke to us as we came up, saying: 'You had better not go any nearer just yet. There is a man behind the house; we saw him come on to the grass plot and go back again.'

While we stood straining our eyes, a distant figure appeared, pressed close to the wall of rag-stone. A peculiarity about trying to distinguish objects in great detail from a distance, which springs perhaps from the fact that the brain can always interpret better than the eyes can see, is that

BEANY-EYE

the harder one looks the more difficult it is to see. It was certainly so on this occasion when the difficulty of making out what was going on, added enormously to our excitement and curiosity. We became convinced almost immediately that some drama was being played of which we were only able to catch fragmentary glimpses. For hardly had the first figure vanished when a black figure made its appearance on the other side of the house. Some persons watching took this figure to be the first, though in that case he must have raced at top speed round the house before reappearing, moving very slowly and hesitatingly. I at once jumped to the conclusion that the first figure was Beany-eye and that the second was Jupp, and I was positive that neither of them was my father. Since the distance was so great, my identifications were not generally accepted. But whoever they were, whatever was going on, was clearly taking place on the far side of the house. When the second man disappeared, we imagined all sorts of horrors as occurring and were astonished when we saw the first man reappear, wandering slowly and aimlessly, as it seemed, down the garden path. He actually stopped once and then rambled on again, and before he had disappeared the second man came into sight walking slowly and carefully after him. But though for a few moments both were visible to us, they were never in sight of each other,

BEANY-EYE

and it was conceivable that they were unaware of each other's presence. This reflection added immensely to our sense that a drama was going on.

While we were waiting for them to reappear, two tall and rather stylish Surrey police from Bulling Green came past walking very quickly and the waiting crowd at once got moving and began to follow them through the wood. I was able to leave Mabel at this time and join a group of neighbours and after that found myself quite at liberty, so that it was not long before I was standing watching the scene from a corner of our garden and shortly afterwards was able to get into the house.

For upwards of forty minutes after my mother and Sophy had fled, Beany-eye must have been alone, occupying himself, in Mabel's words, in roaming and roaring round the house and in making intermittent attempts to break in. Nothing could have been easier than for him to effect an entrance at any of the windows, he had only to break a pane of glass and to draw back the bolt, but apparently he was an unpractised burglar and he confined his attention to the back door, a very solid affair with a huge lock, against which he vainly dashed the heaviest piece of his artillery, which was one of the iron-shod beams used to brake the two-wheeled farm carts and tumbrils from the quarry when they were descending one of our steep hills

BEANY-EYE

— the beam being fixed under the axle of the cart, which was tipped back until its weight rested on the beam and its dragging skid-pan. Of late years this primitive device seems to have gone out of use. These beams were carried up the hills again in the empty carts and thrown out on to the grass verge at the side of the road, at the top of the hill, for when they would next be wanted, so that it was easy for Beany-eye to appropriate one of them and carry it down to the house. It was, however, too heavy an object for any man to wield single-handed, and Beany-eye must have imagined himself endowed with titanic strength to think that it would be of any use to him. It was an ideal battering-ram for half a dozen men who could have broken down anything with it, but Beany-eye could do little except bump it into the middle of the door and then drop it, and, though he knocked himself off his feet, the lock held.

Meanwhile, the washerwoman's children had wormed their way through the undergrowth and, after scaling the Mendelsohns' garden palings, had taken refuge with Mrs Outram. Outram was not back from work, but Mr Jupp, caught before he had taken his boots off as he was sitting down to his tea, had decided to set off alone. My father's handling of Beany-eye in the morning had given the builder confidence and he did not even wait for the deaf coachman who followed later, bringing

BEANY-EYE

his reins. When Mr Jupp arrived, Beany-eye, utterly worn out by trying to swing a beam of wood weighing over a hundredweight against the door, was squatting huddled up on the bank outside, but he leapt up at once and 'went for' Mr Jupp, 'giving him a turn'. Mr Jupp naturally turned and fled round the house, and it was of this drama that the distant watchers became intuitively aware. But, finding he was not followed, Mr Jupp reconnoitred round the house very carefully and approached the back yard from the other side but found it empty. Seeing Mr Jupp take to his heels, Beany-eye stopped his rush, but, after a pause, followed him slowly round the house to find out what he had come to say. Thus they each made a complete circle of the house twice without seeing each other, after which Mr Jupp's nerve rather gave way and he retired to the stable, where he was joined by the deaf coachman and shortly afterwards by the owner of the ferrets and the young policeman of the morning. Since our garden was not in his beat, he did not intend to take an active part if he could help it. At this moment my father came swinging out of the wood with a half-unrolled cigarette in his mouth and a bundle of manuscripts under his arm. He was feeling gay and light-hearted but the sight of the group by the gate told him the worst. Beany-eye had come back. Mr Jupp, however, was able to assure him

BEANY-EYE

that he had not broken in and that there seemed to be nobody in the house. No doubt, thought my father, the women have locked themselves into one of the bedrooms.

He put down his stick, hid his manuscripts under a tree and took off his overcoat; then he went down to talk to Beany-eye while the three men followed him as far as the stable to watch. Our garden is like a small amphitheatre with the house in the middle of it, and while my father was talking to Beany-eye, the seats of the amphitheatre began to fill up: that is to say, the heads of our neighbours began slowly to appear behind the hedges as they took up vantage-points in the shaw, or along the path through the wood from which they could get a clear view of the proceedings. And if the garden was the ring, there was no doubt as to one of the other parts: Beany-eye was the bull.

My father went down and found him in the middle of the grass plot; his face was strangely wooden and his upper lip drooped. He was mumbling and talking disconnectedly and it was clear that he was feeling ill and physically exhausted, and he was unarmed.

'Well, how are you feeling?' asked my father, but Beany-eye answered at random with words so jumbled up that no sense could be made of them. My father left him and went to the door of the house and Beany-eye followed him, and said:

BEANY-EYE

'You can't get in there. I want a drink of water; I'm perishing but I can't get any.'

'I'll get you some water somehow,' said my father. 'Then you'll have to go. You can't stay here you know, Joe.'

'I've no place of my own,' replied Beany-eye. 'And I should be all right here if you'd give me my things. They're on the move, you know. They're all on the move. I'm not going till things have settled down a bit, Sir.'

Both of them looked up and it was clear that Beany-eye's words were true. They were on the move, for the garden was filling up and beyond its edges, through the trees, more people could be seen approaching. And at that moment the two Bulling Green policemen came in at the little gate and marched swiftly towards them. Beany-eye turned towards them and made a curiously pathetic inhuman sound, a warning cry of menace which was almost a moan.

'You wait there, Joe. I'll talk to them,' cried my father, and ran to meet them.

'I must get him seen by a doctor this evening,' said my father. 'I believe I can manage him by myself, but I would like to have you wait in the background in case he should become too violent. But I don't think he'll go with you. The sight of the uniform irritates him.'

'Well, we had better have a look at him any-

BEANY-EYE

way,' said one of the policemen. 'I don't think this is really in our beat at all. I believe this house is in Kent.'

'The Kent police say the opposite,' said my father. 'Talk to them about it. Hullo, look out!' For he saw Beany-eye had possessed himself of a large hoe, the handle of which was like a quarterstaff, on which he was leaning, watching the approaching figures. He did not move as the policemen separated and walked round him cautiously.

'Well, young chap,' began one of them. 'You'll come along with us now to the Blindley Infirmary.'

Beany-eye raised his voice in the same pathetic moan of menace, but as he saw the policemen closing in and groping tentatively for their truncheons, his moan changed to a roar; he whirled the hoe over his head and was in the act of charging, when my father unexpectedly tackled him, seizing him round the body and shouting to the two constables:

'Keep back. Get back. Out of sight.'

His words were unnecessary. As Beany-eye whirled the hoe, both policemen had run back, one only some five or six yards, while the other had reached the fence. For perhaps fifteen seconds my father held Beany-eye pinioned, speaking to him as he held him:

BEANY-EYE

'Don't you mind them. I won't let them take you. I'm coming with you.'

But Beany-eye was too strong for him and, getting his elbows down, shook my father off and knocked the wind out of him at the same time. Then with the hoe upraised he charged the policemen, who lost no time in jumping over the hedge at the bottom of the garden. From there they slowly worked their way round to join the group of men by the stable.

Directly they went over the fence, Beany-eye lost interest in them and stood once more inert, while my father, breathing in gasps and with a hand to his side, went up to him again. At that moment he was not in the least afraid of Beany-eye, but was feeling exasperated by the police and by the presence of so many of our neighbours, who were by this time lining the hedges, and before whom he disliked making an exhibition of himself.

'Now, that's enough, Joe. You see you've nothing to be afraid of from them. You come with me and I'll find you a lodging where you will be looked after and can be comfortable until things have settled down a bit.'

He noticed that though Beany-eye's face was like lead, with a hanging upper lip, his whole body was trembling all over and sweating like a horse after a race. He began saying to him: 'That's all right, Joe. That's all right,' but the words were

BEANY-EYE

so obviously untrue that he felt baffled, and changed them to: 'Don't bother about those fellows. They are not worth it.'

Beany-eye moaned again in menace, such a sound as one might expect from a mortally wounded gorilla encompassed by pigmy enemies; it seemed very touching to my father.

A look of intelligence suddenly came across the poor fellow's face and he said:

'You're a plucked one, Sir. There are not many chaps would do what you done just now. You and Frank Charles are the only two as would stand out here with me now.'

'Well, put down that hoe and I'll give you my word these fellows shan't touch you.'

Beany-eye laughed suddenly, a painful cracked laugh, without a smile showing on his face.

'See 'em run.'

'I'll see if we can get a cup of tea,' said my father. 'Then we must be moving.'

By this time Mabel and my mother had succeeded in slipping unseen down to the back door and had let themselves in and were engaged in making tea. Five minutes later, while my father and Beany-eye were engaged in drinking a cup each, a little man in knickerbockers walked briskly down the garden path and went up to them with an expression which was at the same time perky and self-important.

BEANY-EYE

'Is this the alleged lunatic?' he asked, and my father could not suppress a smile at the solemn little face which was somehow so out of keeping with the rimless pince-nez perched on its nose and the checked cloth cap on its head. Beany-eye gazed at the stranger inquisitively without either curiosity or fear. The little man amused him and the idea that he might have some sport with him stirred in his exhausted mind. Yes, he would have some sport with him — but later on; meanwhile it would add to the joke if he were to let the little fellow look into his pupils and examine his furred tongue.

'Bad liver,' said the little man. 'Under-nourished and too much whisky. A lot too much whisky. He's got a touch of fever, either from jaundice or malaria. He wants a sedative and he wants feeding up and careful nursing. He must stop drinking or he may get d.t.'s. But he's perfectly sane.' He turned back to Beany-eye and began firing questions at him.

'How old are you? What's your name? Yes, and where were you born? Can't remember? Neither can I remember where I was born but I can remember what I was told. Ever been abroad or in the army? Not been in India, have you?'

Beany-eye answered these questions stoically and the doctor led my father aside.

'On my holidays. Heard of your trouble.

BEANY-EYE

There's no possible ground for certifying. I hear you've been letting him sleep in a stable. That won't do at all. You can't go on doing that or you may find the consequences very serious, for you as well as for him. He ought to be in bed and nursed for a week. The infirmary? Certainly. Probably the best thing you can do. But there's no possible ground for detaining him.'

My father felt he was wasting his time. In the infirmary there would be another doctor and the sooner they got there the better. He thanked the little doctor profusely and ironically and five minutes later he set out with Beany-eye to Bulling Green.

There had been fear in the house and, as I tiptoed into them, the familiar rooms smelled a little strange to me. But the moment my father and Beany-eye had departed, the front door was thrown open and all our friends were invited to come in and were given cups of tea, which they first declined, then accepted and drank and asked for more. Thus the rooms we lived in were immediately disinfected and the memories of fear were chased out of the windows by familiar cultured voices.

'Yes, ahem, he looked, ahem, quite ugly for a minute or two. From what the Mendelsohns' gardener was saying he has had these delusions before, but they have never lasted.'

BEANY-EYE

The rooms were getting dark and Mabel was bringing in the oil lamps and drawing the curtains and very soon most of our visitors were departing. But one or two of the more imaginative ones stayed on, gossiping with my mother, so that she should not be left alone with Mabel and me. Thus evil was kept from us and Beany-eye was soon forgotten in talking of De Wet, of Cronwright Schreiner and the attitude of the Cape Dutch, of the villainies of Joe Chamberlain and the pathetic impotence of Balfour.



'Childe Roland to the dark tower came . . .'
thought my father as he walked through the wood with Beany-eye beside him. The police were following, keeping at some distance behind him and it was rapidly getting dark, while Beany-eye had sunk temporarily into an almost speechless condition of exhaustion.

But how does the ballad go on? What is the next line and what did he find in the dark tower? Why are there so few madmen in literature? Dostoevsky's *Idiot* is sane; why has no Slav written a great play in the style of Webster, about Ivan the Terrible? And suddenly he asked himself what sort of madness was this of Beany-eye's and what was the cause. Could suffering in child-

BEANY-EYE

hood produce it? Was it due to syphilis, or was it dementia praecox, or nothing more than an acute attack of delirium tremens? And was it his madness that he had first noticed and which had attracted him to Beany-eye? And what was the explanation of his elaborate preparations of weapons, which he would only need when he was mad, at a time when he appeared perfectly sane?

They left the wood and the hard high-road rang under their feet, and my father became aware that Beany-eye's mood had changed. He was no longer walking beside him in a trance, but was intensely alert and suspicious. He turned suddenly and stopped to listen to the sounds of feet on the road behind them and to the sound of incautious voices.

'This way, Joe. I tell you I'll see you get a good bed to-night and I'll go in and see your chum Charles at "The Greyhound" to-morrow and we'll see what we can fix up for you between us. I'll see that you get a good hot supper and a comfortable bed to sleep in.'

Beany-eye uttered a sound that was half an incredulous 'Oh' and half a long sigh.

'I ain't asking you for any bloody favours,' he said suddenly in tones of perfect sanity. Then, in silence, they walked forward until they were clear of the village and had come out on to the edge of the common. And then suddenly my father had

BEANY-EYE

a shock of physical fear that stiffened his cheeks with cold. For a flash he thought: 'I'm mad to be walking with this man. He can feel I'm afraid and it's his last chance of freedom.'

This change in his mood and his thought had been as swift as the feeling of a man who looks down and realises that he is walking on the edge of a high cliff and for a moment he did not dare to trust himself to speak. But almost at once a wave of anger came over him and when Beany-eye stopped he said savagely:

'Come along, I can't hang about all night for you.'

The man had stopped and my father could see him lifting his right trouser-leg and pulling out one of his pointed bludgeons from the top of his sock. He had tied it round his calf with a piece of twine.

'So he's armed, is he?' thought my father, and, speaking in a rather unnaturally high voice, he closed in on Beany-eye, saying as he did so: 'Hand over that, you confounded fool, or you'll do something you'll be sorry for. Give that to me.'

Beany-eye moaned; his teeth chattered and he raised his hand, gripping the little bludgeon, and my father suddenly snapped his fingers angrily in his face.

'Get on, damn you. Get on. And give me that stick.'

Beany-eye recoiled a step and my father, saying

BEANY-EYE

'Please, now, be a good fellow,' took the stick gently out of his hand and sent it spinning over the hedge.

'Come now. I'll stand by you and see you don't get into any trouble. You can trust me.'

Beany-eye once more began to move forwards, at first reluctantly and then faster.

'I'm in a muck with sweat,' he said once. Then, after a long pause: 'There's no call to frighten children with me. I'd never harm a child. They would never have run if somebody hadn't been going round. There's a bitch, rot her, going round to the children.'

'Keep moving, Joe, and we shan't be long. We'll have a glass of beer at the cross-roads.'

Once or twice, before they reached the public-house, Beany-eye stopped to listen suspiciously, but he was very tired and when at last they came to the lighted windows of the 'Bricklayers' Arms' my father was surprised to see that he was soaking with sweat. They had half a pint each and my father gave Beany-eye his handkerchief.

'Wipe your face with that.'

'Another drink, governor, I've been thirsty all day.' My father rapped on the counter, Beany-eye drank and they walked out.

'Can I keep that?' he asked. 'I'd like to have something of yours. You've been good to me.' He was asking for the handkerchief. His mood

BEANY-EYE

had changed and he followed my father quietly and confidently.

At the blue lantern of the police station he started and trembled but he would have followed my father in without a murmur if the bobby outside had not said:

'It's just up the road, Sir. The ambulance is on the way and it won't be more than about ten minutes.'

In the villa the doctor was expecting them and, after looking carefully and kindly at Beany-eye as though he were identifying a precious possession that had been lost, he said:

'Yes, I'll make out an order for his reception at the infirmary at once and I'll have him kept under observation throughout the night.'

'Well, you'll be all right now, Joe. Don't you worry. And I'll be coming to see you soon.'

Beany-eye was screwing up the handkerchief in his hand nervously and did not speak. When my father had gone he looked at it and put it away carefully in his pocket.

Part Three

THAT night Beany-eye made a murderous attack on the infirmary night attendant and nearly killed him; the following day he was certified insane and sent to the county asylum.

A fortnight after admission, he sent my father the following letter scrawled in pencil on two sheets of paper:

Not the 1st of all.

1st

JOSEPH STARLING ON DOGS

I love a dog as I like my life
And never wish them harm. Old Neacher is a
good one
But Pup is much the better, he is so very faithful.
And got a willing eye. If it wasn't for the shake
of that left leg he'd be in better fetter.
So now for Master, Wife, Son and

Lover of DOGS Joseph Starling

I'll do my best for all. I never have found

BEANY-EYE

A better friend in the world that I have been
loving

And never wish to find one.

All I say is true in these few lines.

if you will Please read them one and all

Yours Joe Starling

a nap hand King queen jack and ten.

For the first two or three months he was regarded as a dangerous homicidal lunatic, but by the time five months were up he was almost normal. This rapid improvement was partly due to his becoming very fond of the attendant who looked after him and in whom he had confidence. He complained a good deal of the other patients, probably with reason, and his state of mind can be judged from the following letter:

Dear Sir,

Just a line hoping to find you quite well wife and son am getting on very fair but there is such a funny lot of People here that I can't sleep of a night so that I can't see the use of my stopping here and as for to get a little Bit of tobacco I have to go like a young horse I should be very thankful to you if you could send me some for I don't know which way to turn to get out of their way. I would sooner be in the

BEANY-EYE

middle of some wood so that I did not know than stay here some of them are as sensible but others you can't make head nor tail of it gets fair disheartening to stay here I should be glad to hear from you or see you for some are as mad as March hares and rough too if you could get me away I should be very thankful Yours truly J. Starling.

You know Sir I haven't done anything to be shut up here I do what I can to keep myself from mischief. Yours sincerely J.S.

That letter, of course, bears traces of madness, but it was not written during a fit of insanity, and when my father visited the asylum after he had been there six months and saw Joe and the attendant Whitehouse together, he came away feeling very cheerful but wondering what provision he should make for Joe when he came out.

But in August, Whitehouse, who was a reservist, was suddenly called up to the army as the Boer War was still going on, and Beany-eye, almost at once, had a violent outbreak of homicidal mania after which he remained for two years in a sullen and suspicious state of mind, usually suffering from delusions. My father used to visit him regularly every six months and send him tobacco and books. On most of these visits Beany-eye behaved quite rationally, but on one occasion my father was

BEANY-EYE

warned that he was in a bad mood, and after a few minutes, during which he made rather silly boasting remarks, he suddenly made a spring at my father, aiming a blow at his head. My father instinctively threw his arm up to ward off the blow that never fell—for Beany-eye had only feinted and, crowing with delight at the involuntary movement of fear, began to boast and threaten once more.

'Come away, Sir. Come away. He's not in a fit state to see visitors and your presence will only excite him and make him worse.'

But the other visits were all more fortunate and my father knew that he left hope behind him in the asylum, as well as books and tobacco. It was not much good giving Beany-eye books, but it was a habit of which my father found it difficult to break himself.

One more letter may be given to show his state of mind at this period:

Dear Sir

I hope this may find you and friends and family in good health as I am very well myself I have asked to be let go out to work but the answer is no so that it is no use asking but I should be glad to get out for I very much miss my wages and bit of sport you know Sir I have been used to working with all Classes of men

BEANY-EYE

but here I don't get drunk they watch that I don't get the chance there is nothing here for me to stay about for I am getting like that I shant know anything about work at all but what I do know they can't take away from me unless they cut off my head which I don't know how I should get on without. People walk about here and talk of killing one another that is not a very pleasant feeling I never witnessed two fight untill one or the other was finished quite although I have been very near death myself but never had the thought come into my head that I ever should be brought into an asylum to finish my time I can't get used to a gentleman's life nor don't wish to Yours faithfully wishing you all well

Joseph

But toward the end of the year Whitehouse was demobilised and came back to his job and there was at once an immense improvement in Beany-eye's condition. He felt that he had a friend and a master to whom he was attached, and the cloud of delusions that had grown up out of fear, suspicion and resentment, was dissolved. In January he asked to have his case considered and in February he wrote to my father to say that he would shortly be released, and almost at the same

BEANY-EYE

time a letter came from the asylum authorities in which they said: 'We cannot keep this healthy young man, who should be living a useful and active life and earning his own living, any longer. . . .'

Directly my father had read this sentence he saw that he must do something definite about Joe's future. 'Unless I do something decisive he will start drinking and get into trouble and for the rest of my life he will be a millstone round my neck. I must settle the business once and for all, and the best thing is to send him out to the colonies where he can make a new start in life and where the primitive conditions will suit him far better.'



Joe's mother and old Lewis had both died, not that it would have been of any use my father's consulting them. He wrote, however, to Sam asking him if he would like to do anything for his brother, or at all events see him before he went out to Canada, as it would probably be for the last time in his life. But Sam refused either to see his brother or to help him, 'never having had anything from him.' 'My time is took up and I have five in the family' was the last sentence in an uncompromising letter. But shortly after this, Joe's sister wrote to say that she had heard from Sam, and as she was working at an hotel in the Clerken-

BEANY-EYE

well Road she would like to see her brother if he were in London before he went to Canada.

My father thereupon told Joe he would send him to Canada, and bought him a second-class ticket and an outfit. I remember that he took a great deal of trouble in getting things that he thought that Joe would like and clothes that would fit him, of the kind that would be most useful to him, heavy underwear and very thick socks and a solid, double-breasted pilot's coat, for there would still be snow on the ground when he reached Quebec. I remember my father's asking me if I could suggest anything that Joe would like and that I thought he ought to have.

I toyed for a moment with the thought of a Canadian axe and then rejected it.

'You must get a belt for him,' I said. 'A leather belt, with a secret pocket lining in which he can keep gold-dust or money. It ought to be made of human skin,' I added, remembering a wonderful belt in a favourite school story. Except for this last detail, my father thought this was a good suggestion and bought a really first-rate belt. Then, twenty-four hours before the ship sailed from Liverpool, he went down to fetch him from the asylum.

Joe was waiting, clean and well-shaved but pale and nervous. Before they left the asylum my father showed him some of the things that he had

BEANY-EYE

bought for him: a blue sailor's cap with a leather peak, which suited him far better than his old billy-cock, the belt with the secret pocket and a fine large clasp-knife with several blades. A four-wheeler cab took them to the train. At Croydon, the only other passenger in their carriage got out and Joe, who had several times slipped his hands under the points of his waistcoat to feel his new belt, now unbuckled it and laid it on the seat beside him and examined it attentively.

'Anyone would lay that was nought but a belt. I can take care of my money now,' he said with delight. Then came the turn of the knife; its blades and all its instruments were opened and examined one after another and their exact uses discussed with my father.

'I've a sailor's ditty-box for you to keep your letters in and I've written you a set of rules to live by and have put them in the secret drawer.'

These rules of life were rather spartan and had worried my father a good deal. There were three great prohibitions: Joe must not drink, he must not marry and he must not live in a town. But what hope was there of his keeping to so strict a rule? Perhaps he could be made to keep them for a time; and my father explained them gently and Joe agreed enthusiastically to abide by them as the train slowly puffed its way from Clapham Junction to London Bridge. Their journey was

BEANY-EYE

a happy one, and from the top of the horse-omnibus they could feel that spring was already in the air as they crossed the Thames and Joe looked, with the eagerness of a man returning to life, at everything; at the sea-gulls, at the barges and at the solid jam of traffic, the cab-horses and dray-horses clashing their shoes against the granite setts and straining at their traces as the whole mass of traffic that filled the streets as far as they could see, got once more into motion.

The pigeons were mating on the cornice of St. Paul's and Joe pointed them out with a jerky, uncertain gesture.

'Once he gets confidence nobody will ever guess there was ever anything abnormal about him,' thought my father. And already, without being aware of it, he had given Joe new confidence by taking him on a bus. Lunatics are taken about in cabs, and when my father led the way up the stairs of an omnibus, Joe knew that he was being treated as a sane man. But though the morning had been a happy one, lunch was a depressing meal. Joe's sister was a starved-looking young woman who had quite lost her looks, and as soon as she saw her brother, she began to cry and continued occasionally sniffing and wiping her eyes all through the meal. But Joe smiled gently all the time and did not seem to be irritated by her tears. He did not want anything better than the little

BEANY-EYE

eating-house in the Euston Road to which my father had led them and the boiled silverside, suet dumplings and carrots were his heart's desire, for he was hungry, and the waitress who served them slapped the plates down without looking at him queerly. There is a tradition of women's tears in many working-class families, and Joe was not surprised that Sally should cry over him and minded it much less than my father did.

Sally herself wanted to cry and restraint would have seemed to her inhuman. She had no wish to be comforted and my father's efforts in that direction rather annoyed her. Courage, hope and humour to bear existence was her everyday equipment, but on the rare occasions when she thought of her starved unhappy childhood, her brothers and sisters scattered, her parents dead and realised that she had no one belonging to her and that those of her own blood cared even less for her than she did for them, at such moments the tears poured forth, and she felt that it was indeed proper that they should. Joe had always been a trouble and he and her mother between them had disgraced them all, but he *was her brother* and now she would never see him again. The tears ran down her nose, and one of them fell into the spoonful of marmalade pudding that she was holding, and when my father said: 'Joe's troubles are all over now; he's going to a country where men like him are wanted,' she

BEANY-EYE

began to sob convulsively. Such words were no consolation at all to her, since she was weeping, not on Joe's account, but on her own. He might make a fresh start in Canada, though she doubted it, but he would leave her as lonely in Clerkenwell as he did when he was in the asylum.

The meal was over; the Liverpool train would be leaving in half an hour. Her emotion was running its due course and as my father beckoned to the waitress, she whimpered:

'We must believe in a better world, Joe.'

'Yes, Sally, that's certain.' He was thinking of the New World rather than the next, when he added: 'If I get the chance, Sally, I'll send you some feathers for your hat, or something. Do you mind I got you a jay's wing once?'

The memory was pleasant; her mood changed as they walked to Euston, and she was moved to kiss him once he was securely in the railway carriage and smiled and waved encouragingly as the train went out.

Joe had not specially enjoyed seeing Sally, but he was undoubtedly pleased that she should have come to see him off. It is better to have a weeping sister from the Clerkenwell Road than nobody at all. And now that duty was done, he could give himself up to the delight of looking out of the window and watching houses and streets, factories and fields, cows and sheep, and teams ploughing,

BEANY-EYE

flashing one after another past the window. And just as it was getting dark, he saw something which filled him with horror and remained unforgettably in his mind for the rest of his life. Whenever he remembered it in after years it made him thankful that he was safe in Canada and not in England. It was like a black nipple rising out of the dark shadows of the countryside and from its top there spouted the flames of such a fire as he had never seen before: a molten fire like hell. He did not speak of it or point it out, but watched it silent and intent until it was out of sight, and it was some time before he felt himself again.

It was quite dark when they reached Liverpool, but the smell was different from that of London, the accent of the porters was different and this strangeness made both of the travellers feel suddenly on their guard.

'Where is he taking me, after all?' flashed into Joe's mind: 'What sort of chance shall I have among strangers?'

'What on earth shall I do if the doctor rejects him at the medical examination?' my father asked himself. 'I am crazy to think that I can ship him straight off like this.'

Joe's kitbag was swung on to the roof of a four-wheeler and they rattled off to a third-rate Scotch hotel. My father engaged two bedrooms, the luggage was carried up and, after washing their

BEANY-EYE

hands, they went down to the dismal sitting-room where the gas whistled and two seedy-looking residents greeted them perfunctorily without budging from in front of the fire. Even by gaslight, the griminess of everything astonished my father; the antimacassars had washed grey with years and the ornamental grasses in the hand-painted flower vases were charged with a thick, unnatural pollen of soot. The stained ceiling, the wallpaper which had become the colour of the dregs in the bottom of a glass of port, and the sombre mottlings of the carpet, all combined to demonstrate the ingrained respectability of dirt. The hotel was indeed a home from a million respectable and dirty homes.

My father and Joe seated themselves in a dim corner and were looking over a booklet with pictures of lumbering on rivers, and of harvesting wheat, when the door opened and a bald young man came in rubbing his hands together.

'A raw evening, gentlemen.'

'Aye, it is that, Mac.' But the other of the two men standing before the fireplace turned and asked in a Scots accent:

'Weel, Doctor, ha' ye come fra' the asylum?'

At the last word Joe leapt to his feet and my father sprang up with him and without hesitation pushed him violently towards the door and dragged him out after him into the passage.

Joe was shaking all over uncontrollably in

BEANY-EYE

violent terror, his face wet with a rush of sweat, his eyes unseeing. My father afterwards thought of Joe's phrase 'going like a young horse,' and noticed he was fumbling in his pocket. But the shock was so profound that it left him momentarily almost limp. My father took hold of his hand, damp with sweat, and his shoulder and pushed him to the foot of the stairs and urged him up them.

'Come up to your room, Joe.'

For a moment they struggled together in a sort of embrace and all the while Joe was opening the clasp-knife in his pocket. Then my father pushed him into the bedroom and turned up the gas.

'You don't twist me twice,' said Joe in a hoarse whisper.

'You're all right, Joe. You believe in me. I'm doing right by you. Here's the ditty-box I bought for you to keep your papers in with a lock and key and here's your ticket, second class on the boat to Quebec.'

Joe sat half-dazed on the edge of the bed, his chest heaving and his eyes with that glazed cast in them that had earned him his nickname.

'You've got the money I gave you in your belt and I'll give you the rest of it now. I trust you and you can trust me and you can see I'm sending you to Canada. There's no more asylum for you and you know it.'

A slight moan, of anguish, of fear and of menace,

BEANY-EYE

the cry of a strong creature that knows it is too stupid, came from him and, hearing this ominous sound, my father sat down beside him on the bed and putting his arms round his shoulders held him in a close embrace until the violent breathing and the trembling slowly stopped. Then, still holding him with one arm, he picked up the ticket for the steamer and put it on Joe's knee.

'It's all right. I swear it's all right, old man. And you know it's all right. The boat sails tomorrow morning at a quarter to nine with you on it. You know that as well as I do. Don't you?'

Joe slowly nodded his head and swallowed; my father let go of his shoulder; there was the snap of the knife shutting inside Joe's pocket and he slowly wiped his face with his handkerchief. Feeling his embarrassment, my father picked up the solid little wooden box and balanced it on his knee.

'It's clever the way that works,' he said, and pulling up a little peg showed him for a second time how the secret drawer in the bottom sprang open. Joe took the box in his hands, shut the drawer, then pulled the peg open and shut and opened it again several times, peering at it closely to make out just how it worked.

A gong was beaten loudly in the passage downstairs.

'Well, are you ready to face some supper?'

Joe grinned and nodded, then filled his basin

BEANY-EYE

with water and plunged in his face and my father noticed that he gulped a mouthful or two and swallowed once or twice before he lifted his face and dried it on the towel. They went down rather late and ate in silence. When the meal was over, my father said they had to be up early next day and that they would go to their rooms at once and turn in early. Before they went to bed they played a game of cribbage. There was no fire and the cold room in which my father slept was full of stale tobacco smoke when they said good-night. For several hours my father lay unable to go to sleep. He was full of anxieties about the morrow; it would be all up if Joe were to start trembling and sweating like that in front of the doctor who was medically examining the emigrants. But, as he lay there, he was determined to go on. Whatever the outcome, he would not draw back, for he felt certain that the one hope of Joe's living a normal life was for him to find himself in new surroundings where his first uncertainties would be put down to the inexperience of a fresh arrival in a new country.

A fog gathered that night over the Mersey; towards morning the sounds of the hooters grew long and strident; city, docks, estuary and mudbanks were swallowed up in grey and brown. The Scottish doctor, down the passage, woke suddenly and raised himself on his arm to listen: somebody

BEANY-EYE

was moving in the room next door to his. There was the sound of a ship's siren loud and close, the noise of a jug being set back noisily in the basin, and voices. Something about the way in which he had been wakened, and the memory of the oddly assorted men he had seen the night before, gave him a disagreeable feeling. He remembered that he had locked the door and, covering his head with the blanket, fell asleep again.

Joe had waked suddenly; the sirens hooted menacingly; he saw himself in the half-darkness of a strange room and wondered where he was. Then, in the ugly yellow-grey light, he saw his new trousers hanging over the broken-backed chair and his belt; the hooter stopped and he heard his cheap Waterbury ticking. He remembered Canada and then wondered uncertainly why he was being sent away so quick, without being given a chance to look about him. Quite a good reason for this came into his mind; he grinned and got out of bed, having reminded himself that he wanted a drink. He pulled on his trousers and looked about him; there was no wash-hand stand or water-jug in his tiny bedroom, so he softly opened the communicating door and looked at the figure sleeping on the bed in the next room. The curly hair was tousled on the pillow and the face looked like yellow wax in the murky light. Joe walked across to the wash-hand stand; there was a razor and a

BEANY-EYE

shaving-brush lying there, and Joe thought that he had not been allowed a razor to shave himself for four years and he understood why not. He grinned, thinking that he had better be careful how he started using one again or he might cut himself. Then he lifted the water-jug and drank deeply, and the water from the dirty jug was wonderful, soft and cool, and the taste of it cleared away the last of his uneasy fears.

Just then, from almost on top of them in the river, a ship's siren blew its great trumpet of despair; a note that went on and on. Joe was startled and set down the water-jug with a clumsy crash and the sleeping man woke and sat straight up in bed. Without his spectacles, he could not see Joe very distinctly but he was, on the instant, startled and wide awake; in full possession of his faculties, but rather scared.

'You can hear they are getting up steam on your boat early,' he said, and patted the coverlet near his knee with his long fingers. 'Come and sit down.'

He remembered suddenly having left the razor on the wash-hand stand. Joe eyed him steadily and sat down awkwardly.

'My boy Dicky would give a lot to go to Canada like you; he thinks of nothing but fishing and hunting and Red Indians. He chose the belt and wanted you to have a tent.'

Joe smiled. 'I lay we'd get along together fine,

BEANY-EYE

now,' he said, and then jerked his head sideways as though to dismiss the subject, and cleared his throat.

'I woke up for I were thirsty and came in here for a drink. There's no jug in my room. And I thought I would tell you, Mr Butler, that I know why you're sending me out to Canada and that I'm glad to go and grateful for the chance. I shan't act foolish again.' He ruminated and spat into the corner of the room. 'It were a rum go when we come in last night.'

They looked at each other and smiled; my father felt for his spectacles and put them on, and Joe stood up and walked to the door. For a moment he paused, then asked rather sheepishly: 'Were that there hooter for the steamer, Sir? I don't have to miss my passage.'

'The tender doesn't leave for three hours yet.'



They breakfasted early and alone and Joe was eager and in good spirits, wolfing down his ham and eggs and cleaning up every particle of bacon-drip with crumby bread; he did not for a moment suspect that my father was asking himself all the time: 'How will he behave at the medical examination, if he feels the doctor's hand upon him? That is the question.'

BEANY-EYE

The fog had cleared and the streets were gleaming wet after rain, strewn with horse-droppings and sheets of wet newspaper that flapped in the gutters.

'Russian man-o'-war sunk. Japanese army landed,' shouted the newsboys and my father automatically bought a paper. But more important than Russian warships was the fact that Joe had never seen the sea before and that the sight of the seagulls and the docks and the smell of salt water were all new to him. They could see the liner anchored in mid-stream out in the Mersey, standing high up out of the water; in the early morning light it was difficult to judge its distance. The tender was waiting alongside to take off passengers who queued up behind the gangway carrying bundles and bags.

My father had taken for granted that emigrants' friends would be allowed on board to see them off and followed close behind Joe, taking his turn at the gangway. Two officials stood one at each side, collecting the embarkation cards, and as the passenger ahead of Joe stepped up, the examining doctor whisked off his hat. My father's heart stood still; he believed at that moment that if craniums were being inspected, Joe, who had very little crown to his head, would never pass the test. He looked his best in the peaked cap. It was thus an enormous relief when the doctor only pulled down Joe's lower eyelid and, seeing that the white

BEANY-EYE

was clear and that his skin was fresh and clean, motioned to him to proceed. My father, coming next, was stopped for his embarkation card.

'Ticket? Where's your ticket?' he was asked sharply.

'But I'm with a friend seeing him off.'

'No use, my man. Stand back.' And he was forced to go back down the empty guarded gangway which led off the tender beside the crowded one, along which the emigrants pressed, carrying their bundles and gazing anxiously ahead of them. As he went down it, he looked back and to his horror saw Joe coming after him, a formidable-looking figure who had pushed the sailor aside to follow his only friend.

'Go back, Joe! Go back! I'm coming. I'm coming on after,' he yelled. Joe hesitated, surprised that he had done wrong and then, obeying the voice and furious gesture, turned slowly and disappeared past the sailor guarding the end of the gangway. A moment or two later the last of the passengers were aboard and the tender cast off and steamed away.

My father stood, hesitating and uncertain for a moment, and a little man, who had been watching the scene quietly, came up to him and said:

'You can go on the next tender and see your friend off. It will be all right.'

He stared back in surprise and then saw that

BEANY-EYE

there was another crowd of passengers along the quay, another tender being warped alongside while men were pushing the gangways into position. The little man spoke gently and without fuss to a sailor and my father walked aboard. He found Joe in the liner in a little cabin with three other men where there was not room to swing a cat. It was not necessary for him to have come: Joe was hardly expecting him and listened to my father's last injunctions with a puzzled smile. Already he was settling into his new world. The boat on which he found himself, the cabin and the men he was to share it with, were already more real to him than anything in his past. In a few days the memory of the asylum would have faded and become unreal and all the events in his past life would be put aside as not being for daily use, but belonging to the things in his ditty-box; pencils and paper and a prayer-book, all for Sundays, and rarely looked at or remembered then.

'I'm all right, Sir. I'll be all right.'

'Good-bye, Joe. Don't forget what I told you. Write to me when you get to Canada.'

My father darted down the long corridor and hurried away at the cry of 'All off the boat.' The siren blew and blew again; the last rope splashed into the water and was coiled painstakingly by a sailor to whom these departures were routine work. But a dozen whistles were shrieking all round them

BEANY-EYE

from boats in the Mersey and a flag was being run up, as the great screws thrashed the water, and hundreds of faces gazed out from the top of the towering steel cliff, waving and shouting, not to the almost empty tender, but over the top of it to the crowded docks. The great ship moved and the tender moved, and my father looked first at the crowd lining the deck and then at the other crowd shouting and waving on the docks, and it seemed to him that the movement and the noise and the crowds and the ship carrying its hundreds of working people each one of whom had finished a chapter of disappointments and of failure and was setting out in hope of a new kind of life, that all these things and people, with the gulls and wind and sea, was what he had come for; the clue that he had been seeking. He saw it as the ending of a piece of music with the two choirs of singers being carried further apart. And a little later, as he stepped ashore on the almost deserted dock, he remembered the article that he had been meaning to write on the psychology of crowds. Already the liner was hardly more than a smudge of smoke far down the estuary.

THE END

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